

# LITERATURE & LITERARY CRITICISM



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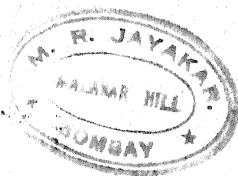
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To  
My Wife  
*without whose encouragement  
these pages would have remained unwritten.*



## PREFACE

Here is an attempt to consider some of the problems connected with the *nature of literature* and the *nature of literary criticism*. The treatment is more suggestive than exhaustive—a programme for discussion rather than an authoritative summing-up of conclusions. The original plan, as chalked out in Chapter 3, was more inclusive than the plan actually carried out in the book. I have, however, retained the original statement in the hope that I shall be able at some future date to redeem the promise to myself. The large debt—in respect of general attitude and particular ideas—I owe to writers like T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis will be apparent from the numerous references to them and quotations from them. I am grateful to the authorities of the University of Bombay for their permission to include Chapter 4, which was originally printed in Vol. XVI. Part 2 (September 1947) of the *Journal of the University of Bombay*.

M. G. BHATE

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## CHAPTER I

### LITERATURE AND LITERARY CRITICISM



The tradition of culture in all advanced communities has always given a place of honour to literature and the makers of literature. It was more common in the past to speak of poetry than of literature, of poets than of makers of literature. Making of poems in a metrical form and reciting of poems in a singing voice has been a recognised kind of cultural activity in primitive as well as in advanced communities. The reference to poetizing as a *cultural* activity is intended to point to the fact that it is valued as delightful and self-sufficient in itself, not as a means to some other ulterior ends. The bards of Greek antiquity and the minstrels of mediæval Europe, both of them the makers as well as the reciters of poems, always found a kindly welcome and were given a spontaneous hearing in high circles as in low, in halls and taverns, courts and cottages. Men liked the experience of having their imaginations stirred by tales of wonder and flights into fairy-land, their emotions moved and uplifted by heroic, tragic or erotic poems, their minds enlarged by the new conceptions of life and revelations of its meaning in poems of a religious or metaphysical strain. In societies which were free from the discrepancy between living and earning a living the habit of composing and reciting poetry and the habit of listening

to the recital were matters of individual life and social course. Poetry did not make people uneasily self-conscious, ostentatiously self-righteous or unreservedly bored as it often does in modern societies. Poetry did not appear to be irrelevant to the interests of the average man living a normal life : it was a part of life.

It is common to use poetry and literature as interchangeable terms. That creative, rhythmical, memorable use of words which characterises literature is of the essence of poetry. The novel and the essay, no less than the lyric and the drama, take shape in poetic language. Poetry is a part of literature, but a part which signifies and symbolises the whole. It is the fruit of the intensive cultivation of qualities which are present in literature. The habitual, though not universal, resort to metre and the varied use of imagery in poetry testify to the existence of an elaborate and complicated pattern of experience which the poet seeks to express : but a similar patterning of experience is an essential feature of all literature. Of course literature is a wider term than poetry, as it includes forms of imaginative or artistic writing like novel, essay and short story which in ordinary usage are not included in poetry ; but the qualities which assimilate these forms to poetry are far more important than the qualities which separate them from poetry. Literature is often poetry in dilution, poetry is literature in concentration.

The phrase 'imaginative or artistic writing' goes to the root of the matter. The large sense in which literature can be said to embrace everything that is written or expressed in language is inapplicable to the present context. We want to exclude from literature scientific types of writing in which the

writer uses language for a logical, purely intellectual exposition of matters of fact and generalisations from facts. We want also to exclude utilitarian types of writing in which the writer uses language for furthering his own or other people's interests in the business of earning a living. By literature we agree to understand those imaginative types of writing in which all the resources of language and powers of words—logical and psychological, intellectual and emotional, literal and suggestive, precisely limited and ambiguously unlimited—are freely drawn upon for at once the exploration and the expression of life as a man lives it, experiences its worthwhileness and weighs its values. Literature is the music which streams out of the attempts of man to attune himself to life on the key-board of language. It is appropriately described as *imaginative* writing because it grows out of and in its turn fosters a perfect harmony of the different faculties of thought and feeling that compose the human consciousness. This harmonious functioning of the components of human consciousness is what English critics like Dryden and Coleridge have in mind when they refer to the *imagination* as the supremely poetic faculty. It is not a psychological but, fundamentally, a common sense interpretation of the word imagination that helps them to elucidate the nature of literature. The point in describing literature as *artistic* writing is that like music, painting and the other arts literature seeks primarily to give delight : it is a form of entertainment, a 'superior amusement', not a means to win a practical, business-like 'success in life'. Out of all the controversies about the function of literature one point emerges as fixed beyond dispute, that a piece of literary writing must have, first and

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last, an entertainment value, like a form of play, that it must, of its own nature, become the centre of the reader's spontaneous, freely-given, genuine, disinterested attention. It must give readers the feeling of sauntering on the playway in life.

The distinction between oral and written literature has little importance in the modern world where mass literacy has ingrained in men the habit of devouring words from the printed page. The predominantly oral nature of literature in the past put a premium on metre which is an aid to memory and a charm to the ear and made poetry which takes kindly to metre the premier form of literature. It also made the poet continuously and vividly aware of the need to make himself understood by the people who formed his audience and whose approval was demonstrably a condition of his continuing as a poetic craftsman. Today the growth of the reading habit has rendered invisible the chain of the poet's dependence on the good will and appreciation of the audience. It has given him more freedom in the development of his craft and a daringly unconventional expression of his real thoughts and sentiments. It has also increased the danger of his resorting to a system of private word-symbols and becoming inaccessible to the common reader behind a cloud of obscurity. In the past literature was a form of social play, one expression of the art of social life based upon well-recognised traditions and shaped by well-known conventions. It expected from the literary craftsman variations upon traditional themes rather than improvisations of original themes. It trained the writer to transcend the limitations and overcome the idiosyncracies of his personality and become an impersonal, objective, social medium. To-day

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literature is fast losing its social character in an atmosphere charged with individualism and becoming a matter of private talks between reader and writer. It has broken the moulds of traditional themes and conventional forms and has become bewilderingly multiform, obsessed by a passion for novelty. It encourages the writer to dwell upon and exploit his own personality and his private experience, to exalt originality into a point of honour and regard self-expression as the height of achievement. This distinction between ancient and modern has often been usefully discussed in terms of the differences between Classicism and Romanticism; but it is important to remember that the distinction is not primarily one of value, of higher and lower, but one of the social environment, the working conditions which govern the activities and the inter-relations of writer and reader. Modern literature grows out of modern social life and reflects its main features. Its values and its modes are rooted in the values and modes of modern society: they cannot be understood or judged independently of the latter.

If literature is the business of applying and fitting words to things, of shaping our idea of life with the chisel of language, literary criticism is the business of inquiring and judging how well or ill the fitting and shaping has been done. If it is natural for men to compose and recite poetry it is equally natural for men to listen to or read poetry and form their own judgments about its quality, its worthwhileness. To praise the creation of literature as a high and noble calling and condemn the criticism of literature as an unnatural, parasitic activity is inappropriate and unjust. Creation and criticism are complementary activities, like production and consumption. Litera-



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ture thrives and develops best in a society where the writer is put on his mettle by a critical and observant audience or reading public. The great masters of literature are often their own critics : they plough their self-criticism into the soil out of which grow and mature the master-pieces of their art. The more normal cases show a division of labour between writer and critic both of whom are embarked upon a common, co-operative enterprise. Creation and criticism are movements in a continuous process which culminates in the enjoyment of literature. A poem is mute and still-born until and unless a reader plucks out the heart of its mystery.

Literary criticism is only a systematic development of intelligent and adequate reading. The critic is the ideal reader who takes the words on the page and interprets them according to the genius of the language and the craft of the writer, who takes the meaning of the writer and sets it against the meaning of the words that make the piece of writing, who weighs the achievement against the intention and evaluates both the achievement and the intention on the scale of literary perfection. Like the spectator he sees more of the poem than does the poet ; he is not, like the poet, liable to read into the poem more than the words on the page suggest, to suffer from the illusion natural to the poet that the 'vision within' and the pattern of words on the page are one and the same thing. He knows that words which trail for the poet clouds of the glory of that vision flicker and fade in the light of common day. He brings to his reading a taste refined and a judgment steadied by close study and wide experience of books : he can place the new by the old and, where necessary, replace the old by the new.

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Literature and literary criticism, having lived and grown together under common social conditions, are seen to reflect the family likeness of a common parentage. When literature was a kind of social play and the poet faced his audience, criticism was an insistence on the observance of the time-honoured rules of the game and the audience judged the poet's performance by the standards of old traditions and well-known conventions. The fixity of the literary modes was paralleled by the definiteness of the critical tests. When literature became a matter of private talk between writer and reader in a medium of expression which need not be the socially accepted medium, literary criticism tended to become the expression of purely personal likes and dislikes of a single reader. Individualism in literature led to personalism in criticism. Widely accepted principles and standards went up in smoke before the fire of individualistic batteries : new principles and *ad hoc* standards were set up to fit the practice of the writer, new schools of criticism covered new coteries of poets. Modern literary criticism opens all questions and probes them to the bottom : its free exploration is comparable to fundamental research in the physical sciences.

There are great possibilities in modern literature and literary criticism. New ground has been broken and new seeds are being sown. It is easy to make fun of new schools and new movements : but the point that emerges from their activities is the existence of a large number of persons and groups who have devoted themselves to the cultivation of literature and literary criticism. On their courage to experiment and their capacity to learn from experience depends the quality of the harvest.

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## CHAPTER II

### 'PRINCIPLES' OF CRITICISM

The existence of sharply divergent estimates of the literary quality of most writers and writings, the fact that no two critics agree in their valuation of a particular poem and a particular poet leads common sense to the conclusion that literary criticism is purely a matter of personal likes and dislikes, that *principles* of criticism do not exist. Tastes differ according to the personalities of critics, each advocates his own favourites and disparages the rest, the common reader does not take the law from any critic but just pleases himself, and there the matter ends. Just as in life men come together in love and jostle in hate, not along the lines of principles but in conformity with the lineaments of personal idiosyncracies, in literature they pick and choose by the sortilege of their conscious and unconscious minds. If literature is multitudinous and lawless like life itself, literary criticism is above fixities and principles like the individual : neither can be bottled and labelled according to the formulae of reason.

Faith in the possibility that *principles* of literary criticism can be formed out of the confusion of conflicting judgment builds itself on the fact that certain landmarks have maintained their positions in the shifting sands of opinion. Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, the author of the *Mahabharata* have stood the

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test of time, culture and individuality : they are acknowledged by all to have given the world masterpieces of the art of literature the quality of which is universally esteemed and appreciated. If all readers find something precious and valuable in the same poems and the same poets they should agree on the principles on which the excellence of literary works of art can be determined. Against the objection that different readers like the same poem in different parts and for different reasons can be set the fact that the poem which they admire has an artistic unity built out of the diversities of its parts. If the poem is really a great work of art admiration for a part should be capable of being developed into a sense of the whole, and if the same poem is being admired for different reasons there must be some vital kinship between those reasons. Those who value *Macbeth* for its masterly psychology of murder and those who value it for its moral maturity need not be at cross purposes.

The principles of literary criticism can never be a set of standard weights and measures for estimating the literary value of a work of art. They can never make reading a fool-proof, mechanically precise operation. Reading will always continue to be an exploratory adventure in a land of surprises and illusions. Like friendship it will establish an intimately personal relation between the reader and the work of art. The principles of criticism will equip him for the adventure with some general directions about the nature of literature and some particular hints on methods of study. They will give him an idea of literature, its nature and function ; they will lift the veil from the craft and mystery of writing ; they will initiate him into the art of reading and

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interpretation ; they will give him an inkling of the nature of artistic and literary excellence. On the one hand they seek to explain what literature is, on the other they offer suggestions as to how it is to be studied. Being in the nature of generalizations from experience and inductions from particular instances they will never have the rigorous inevitability of deductive reasoning from premisses to conclusions. What they say about literature in general is liable to be inapplicable to a particular piece of writing ; the secret of a particular poem's charm may not be revealed by the suggested methods of study ; the final evaluation of a poem may require a bringing together of the literary experience of books and the practical experience of life which is beyond their reach. And yet, it is a fact of daily occurrence that the reader who has acquainted himself with the principles of literary criticism can get more out of a book and form a more accurate estimate of its literary value than the reader who depends upon his mother-wit. The principles of criticism are a matter of practical convenience rather than of theoretical precision ; while they help both the reader and writer to do their jobs adequately, they cannot make them infallible.

Like the principles of social intercourse the principles of criticism have emerged out of the literary experience and culture of many generations and different civilizations. Men have always thought about literature and tried to fix the characteristic marks of literary excellence. They have considered problems connected with the art of writing and the art of reading. The tradition of wisdom distilled from such thought and experience is made accessible in the form of critical principles. How to make

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it his own and how to apply the principles to the particular problems of his own writing and reading is a matter for the individual reader and writer. He can only acquire and master it by the arduous process of trial and error. Principles of criticism do not teach their own use and cannot offer a short cut to creative or critical mastery.

### CHAPTER III

## MAIN PROBLEMS OF LITERARY CRITICISM

It is useful to place before oneself a list of the main topics with which literary criticism is expected to deal. It has its own field of investigation and sphere of interest ; it has its problems and its methods of attacking them ; it has a number of functions and a corresponding number of types and forms. An enumeration and description of some of these will be a suitable starting point for the main discussion.

The truism that literary criticism deals with literature bears repetition because of the fact that in the hands of some practitioners it swerves into a consideration of problems of life, of human character and conduct, of psychology and morality, religion and sociology. Thus Rymer escapes from literary criticism to a historical research into the records to find out whether the republic of Venice ever employed a Moorish general like Othello, and the Marxist critic seeks to give an economic interpretation of the masterpieces of Elizabethan-Jacobean drama. Arnold went clean out of the field of literary criticism when he considered and appreciated *Anna Karenina* as a piece of life and not as a work of art. The literary critic examines a poem as a poem and never confuses it with life. It is of course true that in dealing with literature he has occasionally to consider the relations between literature and life, to bring a knowledge of



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the poet's personality to bear upon an interpretation of the poem, to probe questions of morality and concepts of religion. But the focus of his attention always centres in the poem or the play which he is criticising.

The first set of problems with which literary criticism concerns itself is connected with the *nature of literature*. It is obvious that unless we have formed an *idea* of literature we cannot proceed to examine the literary qualities of different pieces of writing. We begin by asking the question, What is literature? We consider various types of books and realise that some books belong to literature, others belong to science. This realisation necessitates an examination of the relations between literature and science, their different aims and different methods. As all books, literary and scientific, use the medium of language, light will be thrown on the distinction between literature and science by an exploration of the different uses of language. The nature of literature can be further clarified by placing it over against life and by considering the effect of society on literature. Finally, there is the complex of inter-relationships between writer, reader and literature which must be unravelled and understood.

We cannot adequately answer the question, What is literature, until we have also examined the related question, What are the uses of literature? The *nature* of literature controls and is controlled by the *function* of literature. The problem of function has been a cockpit of bitter controversy among the champions of different schools. There are those who claim with Dryden that 'Delight is the chief, if not the only, end of poesy'. There are others who demand that poetry must make men better in some

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respect. The idea of literature as a criticism of life is countered by the idea that literature holds the mirror up to nature. For some literature is the expression of the poet's impressions, for others it is an escape from the poet's personality. It is necessary to examine and adjust the claims and counter-claims of these different schools and arrive at some workable notion of the function of literature. When the reader knows what to expect from literature and what it will be fruitless to expect, he can approach and tackle it in the right way.

Literature has to be composed and written before it can become available to the public. Croce's *internal* work of art may be breath-takingly beautiful but it is entirely useless to everybody except the artist, because it is not available to the public in an externalised form. Various stages and incidents in the *creative process*, various problems connected with the creation of literature have, therefore, to be considered and explored by literary criticism. Why the writer writes, what passes in the mind of the poet during the act of composition, whether there is a faculty of the mind which enables the poet to create poetry, what is the nature of the imagination and the share of thought and feeling in the creative process, what is the place of spontaneity and artistic discipline respectively in the development of the poet's art—these are some of the topics that suggest themselves when we try to form and define our ideas about the act of composition. Criticism must look at literature from the writer's end, literature in the making : it must enter the poet's workshop and watch him at work. At least a theoretical, if not a practical, knowledge of the art of writing is necessary for a proper appreciation of the products of that art.

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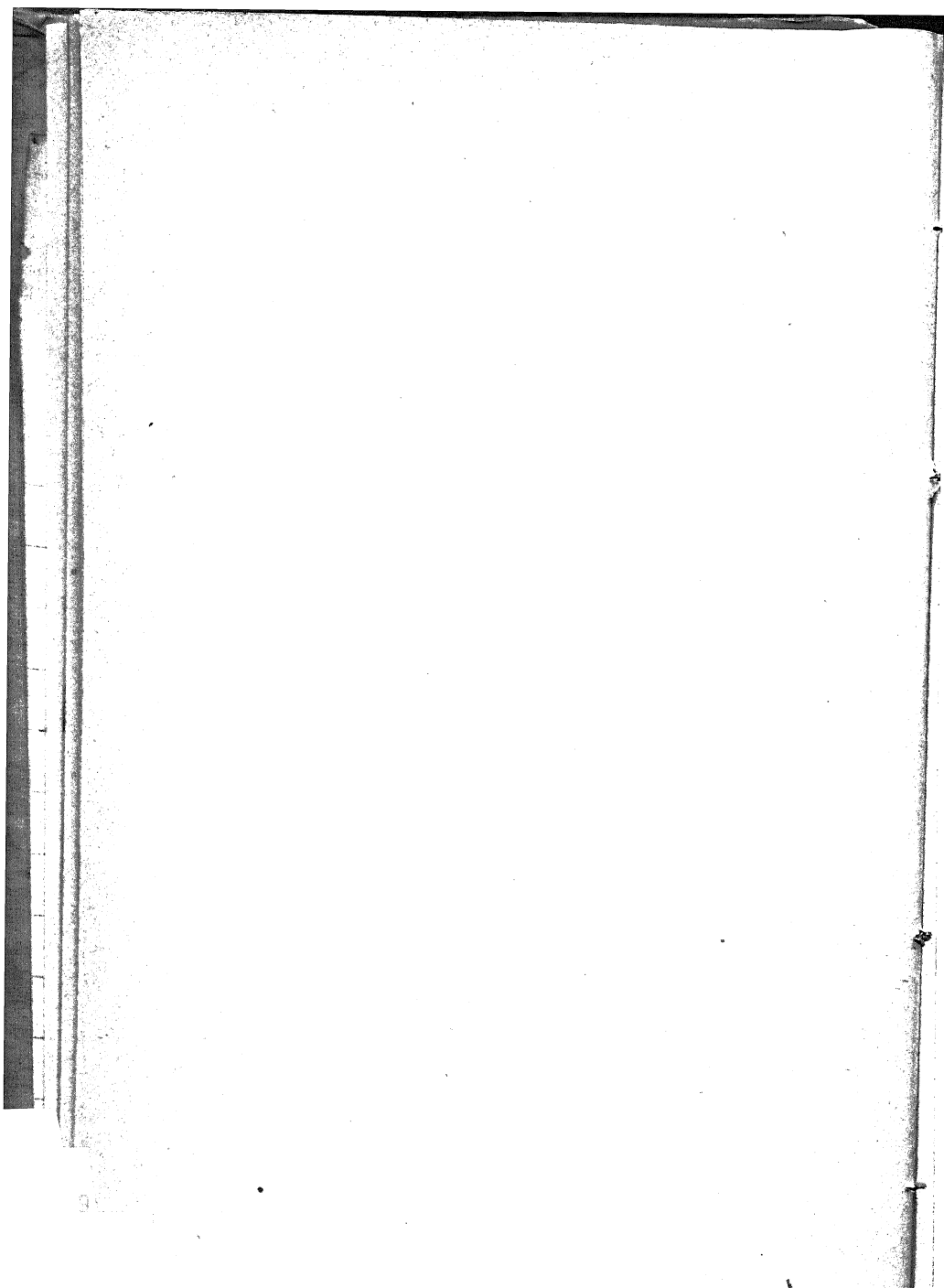
The complementary approach to literature starts from the reader's end. If literature has to be written, it must as well be read. It is a dead-letter, an artifact buried in the sand, unless it is unearthed and resuscitated by the reader. A host of problems connected with *the art of reading* must quite naturally be tackled by literary criticism. Why the reader reads, how his mind works in the process of reading, the nature and methods of interpretation, the relation of the reader's personality to the interpretation which he puts upon the text, the multiplied bearings of reading, interpretation, enjoyment, valuation upon each other—questions like these have to be considered before we can form an all-round conception of literature. If literary criticism is mainly a systematic development of intelligent reading it will appropriately devote close attention to problems connected with the reading of literature. In a consideration of these problems it finds its proper avocation and a fulfilment of its functions.

And lastly, there is the need for a clarification of the *function of literary criticism*. Questions of function seem to be particularly controversial. As in the matter of the function of literature, many theories have been put forward and vehemently championed or challenged by various critics. This is natural, as the dignity of the critic depends upon the dignity of his job. An examination of the claims and counter-claims will enable us to get a reasonably correct idea of the scope and limitations of literary criticism. Here as in all human affairs wisdom is a matter of balance and adjustment, of securing the proper emphasis and hitting upon the golden mean.

As a matter of convenience, the problem of the functions of criticism will first be taken up for

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**consideration.** The other groups of problems will follow more or less in the sequence in which they have been mentioned in the present chapter.



## CHAPTER IV

### FUNCTIONS OF CRITICISM

An attack on the problem of the functions of criticism may begin with a consideration of the fact that *criticism* has in common parlance been regarded as synonymous with *fault-finding*. To criticise an action is usually to express disapproval of it, to be critical of a person's character is to reveal various undesirable aspects of it. Traditionally the literary critic has been thought of as a hanging judge who passes sentences of varying severity on poems and poets. It was by way of turning tables upon the critic that Ben Jonson said in one part of his *Discoveries*, "But some will say, critics are a kind of tinkers, that make more faults than they mend ordinarily." The tradition of regarding the critic as a kind of detective and hanging judge rolled together is based upon the acerbities and acrimonies of literary controversies and critical judgments in the past. Criticism was a weapon in the warfare between rival poets and playwrights: the purpose in view was to blackball an enemy rather than to arrive at an impartial and discriminating estimate of the literary value of a poem or a play. Thus, Greene's attacks on Marlowe and Shakespeare and the personalities of Nashe, Harvey, Lodge and the rest in the Elizabethan age were a characteristic exhibition of blackballing criticism. In *The Frogs* of Aristophanes the rival

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tragedians, Aeschylus and Euripides, are engaged in a fault-finding match.

The point that emerges from these facts is that it is the nature of criticism to be *critical* in the popular sense of the term. It will be wakeful and Argus-eyed, keen to expose shoddy work and counterfeit effects. Criticism that turns soft and goody-goody is far more harmful to the cultivation of genuine literature than criticism which errs on the side of hardness and severity, provided always that it is disinterested and impersonal, dealing with the poem and not with the life or character of the man who has composed it. The need for emphasising the obligation on the critic to be duly severe and critical seems to be urgent when one remembers that much of contemporary reviewing and criticism has become a matter of log-rolling, mutual admiration and sugary, inoffensive generalities. Good manners are undoubtedly useful as a lubricant in social relationships, but they should not make the critic feel awkward about exposing and commenting upon artistic faults and imperfections in the poems or plays which are being criticised. It is more important that the critic should confront the poet with the steep and thorny way to perfection than that he should accompany him along the primrose of dalliance.

The 'ending end' of literary criticism, as Sir Philip Sidney would say, is the final placing of a work of literary art, the estimation of or judgment on its artistic excellence, its evaluation. That is the all-embracing, ultimate function and achievement of criticism. But there are a number of other objectives and functions, in various ways contributory to the main function, which inform and motivate a good deal of critical activity. Thus, there

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is criticism which confines itself to the exposition and interpretation of the text, which is primarily an aid to the proper reading of a book. There is, secondly, the kind of criticism which is absorbed in literary appreciation, which expresses the enjoyment of a book by one reader, the pleasurable impression made on him by the poem. There is further comparative criticism which sets the selected book or author, for comparison or contrast, against other books or authors,—a typically *critical* activity, as it weighs the relative merits and demerits of various pieces of writing. And, finally, there is evaluative criticism which passes judgment on the absolute value of a poem or a play, which assigns it to its place in a scale of perfection, an order of merit. This enumeration of the different objectives placed before themselves by literary critics is not intended to be exhaustive: it is rather suggestive and representative of the main tendencies. Nor is there an intention to establish an ascending scale of values among these objectives. Each is useful in its own way, and has its own field of activity: it need not come in the way of the rest. Frequently, a single piece of critical writing will be found to have more than one function. The intention is to make the student aware that many different lines of study are indicated by the title, literary criticism.

The starting point of literary criticism will always be an attentive reading and study of the text. Literature in its external form is a series of word-symbols printed on the page in a certain order. The reader takes the symbols in with the eye and seeks to get through them at the meaning intended to be conveyed by the writer. The critic, who is above all a trained and experienced reader, will offer his help in the



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business of interpretation and right understanding. Unlike a scientific piece of writing, a literary text is based upon a many-dimensional use of language. While science achieves clarity by attaching precise, logical, unambiguous values to the word-symbols, literature achieves significance by playing upon the subtle, shifting associations, forked ambiguities, rhythmic and auditory values of words and phrases. Allusions to lines, phrases and contexts in other poems or plays as a means of expression, uses of suggestive imagery remove a literary text still further from the directness and simplicity of scientific writing. The resources of the common reader are likely to be limited, his knowledge of the references and allusions restricted by the narrow range of his reading. That is why for the interpretation of the subtler and more complicated type of literary text he is glad to avail himself of the help given by the expert critic. In this sphere the business of criticism is to remove obstacles and clarify obscurities which may hinder or baffle the reader. Thus an exposition of the Elizabethan theatrical conventions and stage conditions may be necessary for a proper understanding of the structure of a Shakespearean play. A passage from Dante will reveal the inwardness of its significance when it is collated with certain aspects of the poet's personality. The layers of literary allusions in *The Waste Land* of T. S. Eliot will have to be mined in the process of illuminating the admitted obscurity of that poem. The daringly experimental word-coinages of G. M. Hopkins and James Joyce will require critical guidance for their proper interpretation. There is the all-important question of imagery. A great literary artist seeks to achieve the impossible—to capture the grace beyond grace.

the meaning beyond meaning, "Which into words no virtue can digest." Delicate complexities of thought and feeling, subtle poises and resolutions of apparently discordant and contradictory conceptions and attitudes, experiences which are composed out of elements from the conscious, subconscious and unconscious levels and layers of the human personality,—these form the significance of and give an inestimable value to passages from the greater plays of Shakespeare, some of the poems of Donne, some parts of the novels of Conrad or D. H. Lawrence. It is only by an original, profoundly suggestive, dynamic use of the different kinds of imagery—conceits, metaphors, symbols—that the masters have succeeded in giving a form and pressure to these imponderables. Here no question of wilful obscurity arises: no simple, direct, common sense use of language can do the job. Imagery is strictly indispensable in the higher reaches of the literary art.

It will be a peculiarly important and responsible function of criticism to unfold the hidden suggestions of the images and make legible the meaning of the hieroglyphs. The critic has to train himself in the art of interpreting imagery as the psycho-analyst is trained in the art of interpreting dreams. He will take the reader by the hand and show him how to take imagery as the centripetal way to the core of the poem's significance. Of course it will not be necessary in every instance for him to guide the reader step by step: it will be enough if he points the way and initiates the process of interpretation. In criticism as in other spheres of life it is important to avoid the danger of murdering to dissect. While line-by-line analysis is in difficult passages a useful

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tool of interpretation, there have been cases where it has

“ . . . . . broke ope

*The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence  
... The life o' the building.”*

The criticism of exposition and interpretation has a long and honourable tradition. Its tendency in the past to occupy itself unduly with grammatical and syntactical regularities has now been overcome and, in the hands of critics like Dr. Richards and F. R. Leavis, it is developing into an extremely valuable method.

If literature is above everything else a form of entertainment, one of the important functions of literary criticism must be considered to be to promote its appreciation and enjoyment. It may be taken as axiomatic that readers will not bother to turn the pages of a book “if the prospect of delight be wanting.” One of the reasons why literature takes a high rank among the agencies that foster human culture is that it is capable of developing in men the capacity for feeling “The joy in widest commonalty spread :” the disinterested delight that readers find in literature is but a reflection of *joie de vivre*. While interpretative criticism enables the reader to come to a proper understanding of the text and thus provides an indispensable preliminary, appreciative criticism gives wings to his spirit by showing him the pleasure which an experienced reader has derived from the poem. What is implied in the long-established tradition of acknowledging the critic to be a man of *taste* is that he is an epicurean in the field of literature, one who derives intense and refined enjoyment from the reading of books. He reads for pleasure and he writes to express and communicate

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to others the pleasure he has derived from books. While in interpretative criticism the critic is in the background and seeks to remain invisible behind the exposition and commentation of the text, in appreciative criticism he has necessarily to come into the foreground and talk about the experiences, emotions, trains of thought and association which the reading of the book has started and stimulated in him. He is talking about himself as affected by the book, revealing his personality in the act of responding to a literary stimulus. Appreciative criticism is a lyrical, subjective form of writing : by means of it the critic achieves self-expression—not as man of the world but as a man of the world of books. It is in its purest form a poem on a poem like Keat's "On looking into Chapman's Homer."

Of necessity, appreciative criticism throbs with emotion and is warmed by enthusiasm. The cool calculation, the subtle poise, the wise balance of some other forms of criticism is antipathetic to its nature. The responses it registers are occasioned by the reading of a book, but they are more likely to conform to the nature of the reader than to the nature of what he has read. The book has suffered a sea-change when it has been absorbed by the critic into his own consciousness and personality. It has become the critic's *Hamlet* or *Antony and Cleopatra* : it has clothed itself in the colours of the critic's imagination. To condemn appreciative criticism for being a creative, emotive kind of writing is to condemn it for being true to its own nature and for performing its proper function. It aims at making the reader interested in the book, stirring his curiosity and heightening his expectations ; it reaches that aim by giving a glowing account of the pleasurable impres-

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sions printed by the book on the mind of the critic.

Appreciative, impressionistic criticism takes a book by itself, enjoys it and admires it as a thing apart. It savours the sweets that lie compacted in a poem and rests for the time being in the poem's individual flavour. It has a childlike quality of living completely in the present moment, without looking before and after : the quality cultivated by Pater's Marius the Epicurean. The development into maturity proceeds by way of comparative criticism. A literary work of art does not stand by itself in splendid isolation. It is related to other works of art by community of aim and kinship of origin : it has been inspired by the author's loving study of other pieces of literature, it represents a particular variation and branching out of literary tradition. A completely original, *sui generis*, incommensurable work of literary art does not exist for the simple reason that it participates in a continuous tradition. Even a symbolist poem or a surrealist text proves on examination to have an umbilical connection with more classical, conventional types of composition.

It is this situation which gives comparative criticism its cue and its function. After the critic has thrown himself into the poem and felt his whole being suffused with its tidal current, after he has lived in and lived through the poem, he has to come out of it and hold it at a distance, get his bearings on it by reference to other poems which belong to the same plane. A comparative study of different works of literary art not only establishes points of contact, of similarity and difference in aims of writing and employment of devices which are serviceable for the interpretation of the several pieces of

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writing and an appreciation of the art of the writers but develops into an estimation of the relative achievements and artistic values of the pieces that are being compared. There is no such thing as a transcendently beautiful poem, a completely successful play ; there are more or less beautiful poems, more or less successful plays which admit of a relative valuation. A comparative study will also make it clear that the very success of a poem in one respect involves its failure in other respects, that variation from the old pattern implies both loss and gain, that each kind of writing and form of literature has a best of its own, an ideal perfection to which individual specimens of the kind approximate more or less closely.

Comparative criticism may follow a number of different leads.. It may go by origins and influences, relate the aims and methods of an author to those of the masters from whom he derives and by whom he is inspired : it will trace Marlowe's artistry to Spenser and the mature Keats to Dante, not as a matter of historical occurrence but as a method of estimating critically the relative superiority or inferiority of the artistic achievement of predecessor and successor. It may go by kinds and forms of literature, comparing novel with novel and tragedy with tragedy, estimate within each form the respective excellences of the different historical variations—set Greek tragedy against neo-classical, Senecan against Elizabethan, realistic against romantic, or, crossing a continent and bridging the gulf between civilizations, place the Greek *Iliad* and the Sanskrit *Mahabharata* together as specimens of the art of epic poetry. It may work by ages and periods of literature, setting the artistic productions of an age against the intellectual, moral, social background of that age, trying to form an

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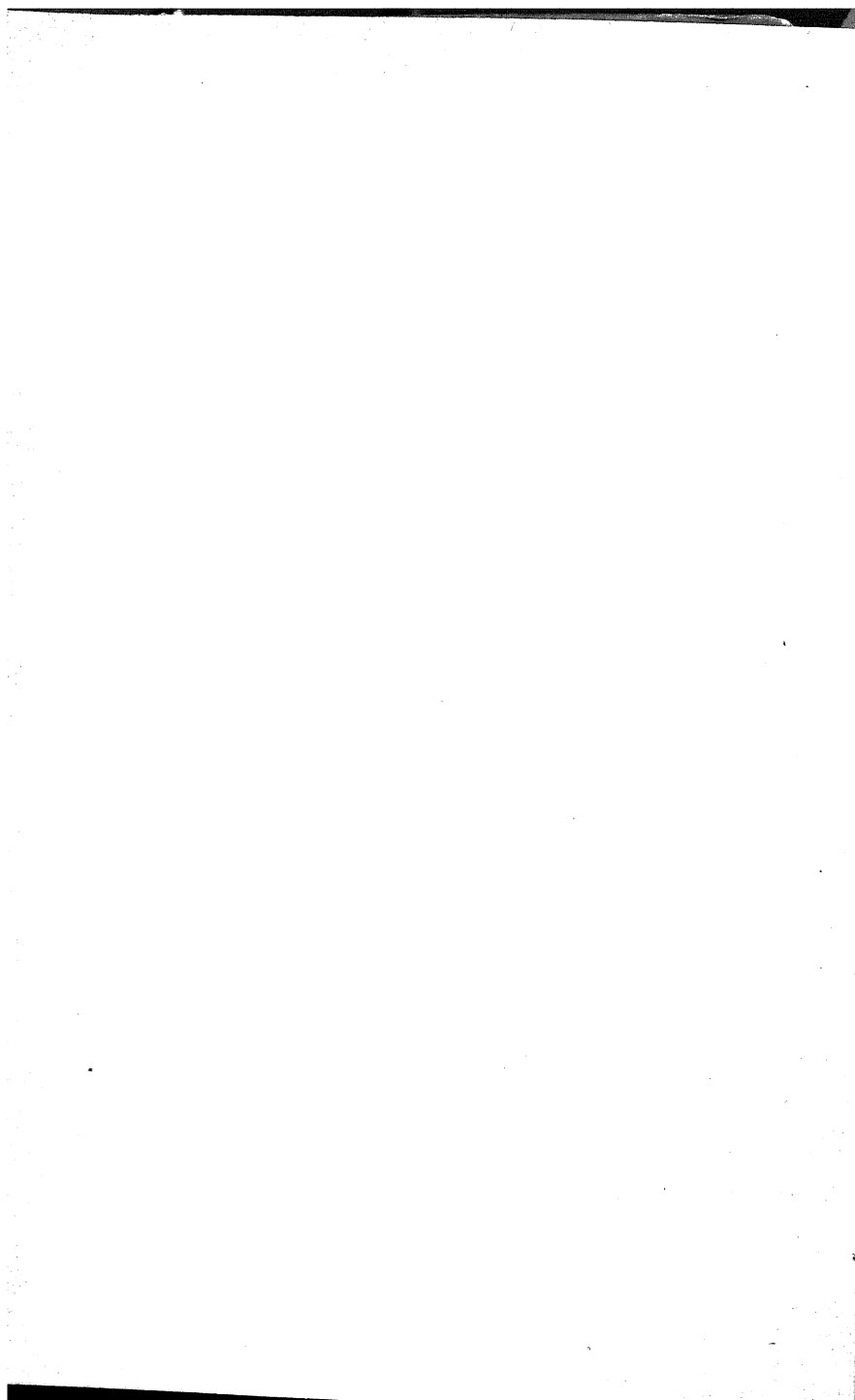
idea of the spirit of the age and the way in which it inspires the literary art of the age, comparing the artistic aims, methods and achievements of different ages by means of a detailed study of selected examples. Thus the Elizabethan age may be compared with the Augustan, the novel in the age of Fielding with the novel in the age of Thackeray; or the intellectual and social background of the Seventeenth century may be studied for its bearings on the nature of Metaphysical poetry. The principle of comparison and contrast is capable of endlessly varying applications and eminently valuable results in the hands of a critic who never forgets that literature is his subject matter and that the critical weighing and estimation of artistic achievement is his main function.

Evaluative criticism seeks to arrive at a definitive judgment on the final, ultimate value or worthwhileness of a literary work of art in and for itself, as well as to determine its place and magnitude in the galaxy of literature. It has the seriousness and finality of the Last Judgment in the sense that it is based upon an adequate ordering and weighing of all the relevant factors. Verbal felicities, structural stresses and balances, the range and importance of the experiences laid under contribution, the inclusiveness and clarity of the vision of life communicated by the poem—these and other aspects of the work of art must be seen and considered in the order of their importance, the genuineness and degree of the organic functioning of its parts must be tested and measured, the apocalyptic power of its "criticism of life" must be assessed, both absolutely and relatively to comparable works of art, before a final evaluation can be effected.

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Evaluative criticism will of course take account of and profit by the findings of other forms of criticism. It will learn from interpretative criticism to put a proper construction upon the words on the page, it will live through and live in terms of the poem, led by the hand by the Beatrice of appreciative criticism, it will use the methods of comparative criticism for seeing the poem in the round and establishing its relationship with other poems and works of art. It will concentrate all the light that can be derived from knowledge of literature : but it will go beyond literature to life, the origin and the fountain of the light of knowledge, and place the mirrored image by the original, the reflection by the reflected. In the final estimation literature cannot be considered in isolation from life : it must show itself to be attuned to life, throbbing with the heartbeat of life. The superiority of *Macbeth* to *Sejanus*, of *The Divine Comedy* to *Paradise Lost*, of Wordsworth to Shelley and of Keats to Tennyson is ultimately justifiable on the ground that the one gives a deeper and more acceptable meaning to life and experience than the other. It is not a matter of the glory of single passages and the splendour of isolated images : it is a question of ultimate values—values for life, values in terms of life. With the answering of that question literary criticism has discharged its ultimate function, its heavy responsibility : it can then resume the more congenial activity of the enjoyment of literature.





## CHAPTER V

### TYPES OF CRITICISM

It will make for a simple and beautiful symmetry if the different functions of criticism were carried out by a corresponding number of forms and types of criticism, each of them in the keeping of a different school of criticism. But though such geometrical arrangements have been discovered by botanists and biologists in various forms and organs of organic life they hardly ever occur in the institutions and activities of men. In the history of criticism many types and schools have been recorded, their origins, aims and methods have been described, their contributions to literature and to criticism have been estimated. For convenience of reference a brief description of some of the more important types and schools is being attempted here.

The earliest and simplest type of criticism may be taken to be *Textual criticism*, in which attention is directed to the words, the language of the text, mainly with the intention of explaining obscurities, construing lines of poetry, commenting upon grammatical and etymological peculiarities. The need for textual criticism is the greatest where the text is written in an old classical language which is either dead or current in a much altered form, so that the interpretation of the text presents numerous special problems. Commentaries on Homer and Hesiod, the

ancient Greek authors, on the *Vedas* written in an archaic form of Sanskrit, on the Hebrew text of the Bible, may be regarded as typical examples of textual criticism. Among comparatively modern specimens, Mallinatha's commentary on Kalidas and Malone's edition of Shakespeare deserve to be mentioned. *Rhetorical criticism*, with its emphasis on tracing figures of speech and exhibiting the ornamental features of the language used by the poet or the orator is only a form of textual criticism. The Greek rhetoricians and many Sanskrit pundits who specialised in the 'Alankarashastra' practised this form of criticism and achieved subtle niceties in distinguishing between the shades of meaning conveyed by different figures of speech and figures of composition—the 'bandhas'. The curious may find a number of examples—the lozenge, the egg, the pyramid—collected by the Elizabethan English critic, George Puttenham, in his *Art of English Poesie*. The tradition of a close, almost a microscopic study of the words with the object of finding out their exact shades of meaning and mysteries of suggestion has received a powerful impetus from the critical theory and practice of Dr. I. A. Richards whose *Practical Criticism* may be regarded as a modern grammar of textual criticism. In a similar way, rhetorical criticism has developed into an 'imaginative' study of imagery in the hands of critics like G. Wilson Knight and F. R. Leavis who show that one of the most reliable instruments for gauging the artistic quality of a writer is the quality of the imagery used by him.

A second group of types of criticism issues from the great Classical-Romantic divide in European literature. The great Greek critic Aristotle is the

colossus who bestrides *Classical* and *Neo-classical* criticism. His cool, logical, scientific, organic ideas about literature stamped themselves into unquestionable currency during the classical and the neo-classical ages of European literature. Classical criticism knew its Aristotle well, but it also knew and studied Classical literature as a living reality. It sought to apply the standards of literary excellence drawn from that study and that knowledge to the new works of literary art and form an estimate of their artistic merit. It genuinely believed that the Greek classics, Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Sappho and the rest had attained the zenith of literary perfection beyond which no later artist could go. It, therefore, advised young aspirants to devote their nights and days to studying and imitating the art of the ancients and encouraged them to try in their own creative work to approximate as closely as possible to the achievements of the masters. As a convenient and masterly summary of the principles on which the ancients erected the structure of their art was found to be given by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, a thorough mastication of this treatise was recommended as the best preparation for literary composition. Gradually, imperceptibly, a study of Aristotle came to be regarded as a short cut to the study of the classics : later, it almost displaced the classics.

Classical criticism, as presented by Aristotle and represented by Horace, Quintillian and others, was intimately in touch with classical literature as a continuous tradition and a contemporary, developing art. *Neo-classical criticism*, foreshadowed by Ben Jonson in England and given its form and substance by Boileau and Le Bossu in France, tried to revive the memories of a tradition that was

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dead long ago from its literary remains in the classical languages (also dead as a matter of contemporary usage) and from its fossilized traces in the treatises of Aristotle and his followers. Neo-classical critics failed to see how unnatural and impossible it was to squeeze the stuff of contemporary literature into the alien and dead moulds of the Greek and Latin classics. They took a mechanical, external view of literary craftsmanship. They thought that the practice of the ancients could be reduced to a precise code of rules and methods. They were ambitious of developing literary criticism to such a pitch of scientific exactness that with its help a man could master the craft of poetry as he mastered the craft of carpentry or masonry. Minor modifications were allowed to be necessitated by changes in social institutions and religious convictions; but, essentially, the making of an epic or the construction of a tragedy was but a matter of using the formula of classical epic or classical tragedy as defined by Aristotle and Horace. Neo-classical criticism failed to realise the organic relation of forms of literature to a way of life, it missed the point of Dryden's perception that 'what pleased the Greeks would not satisfy an English audience'.

Over against both classical and neo-classical criticism may be set *Romantic criticism* which took as its starting point the novel and distinctive features of the new and budding literatures in the 'Romance' languages of mediaeval Europe and which claimed for the modern artists a charter of freedom from the rules of the ancients. Romantic criticism in all forms and ages, in the treatise *On the Sublime* by a late rhetorician Longinus, in the literary renaissance of the Elizabethan age, during the 'Sturm und Drang'

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of Germany and the Romantic Revival in England, has insisted on inspiration rather than on training as the secret of high artistic achievement and has regarded originality, novelty, development of new forms and a joy in adventuring upon untried experiments as the symptoms of the vitality of a literary tradition. Classicism and romanticism represent two distinct but complementary principles which must be harmonized and adjusted in order that the music of literature should find its voice. They are as it were the systole and diastole of the heart of literature. The turning points in their dialectical alternations have proved themselves to be the points of growth in the literary art. Both have advanced to new positions in the hands of contemporary critics like T. S. Eliot, Herbert, Read, Wyndham Lewis and D. S. Savage : the latter's *Personal Principle* will be found to contain a useful summing up of the contemporary debate.

Another group of critical types roughly turns upon the subjective-objective dichotomy. Thus *Judicial Criticism* upholds impersonal laws and principles, rules and conventions of the literary art which are supposed to have a universal and absolute sway. Works of literary pretensions are brought to the bar and judged according to stern and unbending laws. Jeffrey of the *Edinburgh Review* and Dr. Johnson may be considered to be the exponents of this type of criticism. At the other end we have *Impressionistic Criticism* which regards criticism as an intimately personal, unique relationship between the critic and the work of art, which claims for the personal, private impressions recorded by the poem on the sensitive mind of the critic an absolute critical validity. It denies the possibility of discovering

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any impersonal, objective, universal standards for measuring the artistic values of literary works. Criticism, it insists, is not a science but an art : success in it is a matter of genius and taste, not of training and rule. T. S. Eliot's remarks on Arthur Symonds in *The Sacred Wood* give a fairly accurate idea of this type of criticism. Another pair of terms is sometimes used to express the same distinction : *Scientific Criticism* corresponds to Judicial, *Appreciative Criticism* to Impressionistic ; the one seeks to reduce literature to scientific laws and principles—'to discover the formula of the thing', as the Frenchman M. Taine said—the other considers each work of literary art as *sui generis*, incommensurable, unique, and proceeds to discover and enjoy its beauties, its felicities of thought and expression, 'including even the accent, the warmth, the emphasis, the gestures of the living word, the notes, the parentheses, the full stops and commas of the written'.

There is, next, the type of criticism which distinguishes between the substance and the form of a literary work, its matter and manner, and concerns itself with the craft, the technique of literature. Thus, *Technical Criticism* analyses and explains various methods and devices used by the poet, the playwright or the novelist in the construction and composition of the poem, play or novel. In discussing drama it will deal with the problems of plot construction, methods of characterization, uses of soliloquies and asides, building up of dialogue, place of dramatic irony and comic relief and many other technical matters which go to the making of a play. Like the watch repairer or Dryden's 'curious gunsmith' it takes the machine to pieces and observes how the

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springs and escapements operate and fit in. Great poet-critics like Dryden, Coleridge and T. S. Eliot give us masterly examples of technical criticism at its best ; perhaps a good many doctoral dissertations and treatises show it at its worst. The snag in technical criticism is its tendency to separate *technique* too rigidly from *content* or subject matter and create the impression that by mastering technique anybody could turn out literary masterpieces—as Boileau led some to believe. *Formal Criticism* assimilates literature closely to the other fine arts—particularly to the plastic arts—and argues that just as it is the job of the sculptor to work and mould the formless marble, the raw material of his art, into artistic shape and form, it is the job of the poet to create out the formless, chaotic words, *his* raw material, the artistic unity of a poem or a play. The beauty and the meaning of the work of art lies wholly in the *form* which the artist has impressed upon the raw material. Form as so conceived is analogous to the *unity* of a literary work of art that Aristotle sought to define, the ‘beautiful enlivened whole’ which, according to Goethe, the poet created by the power of ‘architectonicè’. Formal criticism seeks to sharpen and define the concept of form, discover its laws and principles and use it as a touchstone in assessing the artistic value of a literary piece of writing. While the bringing together of poetry and the other fine arts implied in this type of criticism is highly suggestive and fruitful, the adaptation of a primarily visual concept like *form* to a non-visual context presents great difficulties. That is why the achievements of this school in actual literary criticism appear to be small. Vernon Lee, Clive Bell, Roger Fry are more relevant to the visual



arts than to literature.

The remarkable development during the last century of the social and 'human' sciences which investigate scientifically the nature and activities of man has affected literary criticism and given it new starting points and lines of study carrying it beyond the pale of literature. According to the new point of view literature is studied not in and for itself but as a synthetic product to be analysed into its elements—biographical, psychological, social. There is *Biographical Criticism* starting from the principle, 'tel-arbre, tel fruit' and exploring systematically the genealogy, the life, the inherited and acquired characteristics of the author for the light which they throw on the characteristics of his books. It believes that there is a biologically exact correspondence between the qualities of the man and the qualities of his literary work, that it is possible to classify men into genera and species and families according to their traits and characteristics and that such a classification can build a scientific basis for literary criticism. Biographical criticism has been systematically and profitably practised by the French critic Sainte-Beuve, but a limit is set to its usefulness by the distinction defined by T. S. Eliot between 'the man who suffers and the mind that creates'. *Sociological Criticism* seeks to explain a work of art in terms of its social environment. It regards the poem or novel as a product of social factors and forces, reflecting accurately the conditions of life, trends of thought, structure of institutions, scale of values characterising a particular society at a particular time. While not ignoring the fact that a poem is written, not by a society or by a set of social trends and forces but by an individual poet out

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of his intimately personal experiences, it reduces that fact to a social order on the ground that a man is after all the creature and product of his age. Thus while *Hamlet* in many ways reflects a particular mood of Shakespeare and presents aspects of his personality, Shakespeare himself is a typical Elizabethan who approaches life along the highways and byways of Elizabethan England. There is, of course much truth in this contention and one of the duties of a literary critic is undoubtedly to make matters smooth for the reader by acquainting him with the social background of a work of art, particularly when it belongs to a bygone age or to an ancient society. But then, a man is not merely a bundle of social tendencies, and the unique, concrete poem, the actual pattern of words on the page may be lost sight of in the smoke of large abstractions like social forces and conditions of life. The temptation for the sociological critic to forget literature in his preoccupation with society and social problems has led men like Taine and Arnold off the track of literary criticism which aims primarily at evaluating a poem as a poem and not as a social document. *Marxist Criticism* is a particular variation on the sociological pattern. Using the methods of the Marxist interpretation of history it relates the works of literary art and the achievements of literary artists to the economic structure of society, the organization of production and the class struggle. Proclaiming it as an article of faith that the adoption of the Marxist philosophy of life is a condition of literary excellence, it judges books and authors by the closeness of their approximation to that philosophy. Literature is a weapon in class warfare, a means to an end: it finds its vocation in fighting for the righteous cause, the

establishment of Communism throughout the world. Like Plato of old, the Marxist critic denies the liberty of self-expression to the literary artist and harnesses him to a specific social order or a conception of order,—a particular set of values. But experience in the past shows that imposed convictions relax themselves in insincerity and hack-work. An artist preoccupied with problems of conformity cannot attend properly to the problems of his art. If literature is an affair of getting into 'apt, significant and sounding words' the vision and meaning of life as the writer sees and understands it, Marxist criticism is irrelevant to the work of writers who are not followers of Marx. Finally, there is *Psychological Criticism* which analyses processes in the mind of the poet while he is composing his poem and processes in the mind of the reader while he is reading it, in the belief that before we can judge and evaluate a work of art we must know what it is and how it has come about. It also seeks to interpret the value or significance of a piece of writing in psychological terms; to measure the extent to which it establishes a 'balance or reconciliation of opposite and discordant qualities' and impulses in the mind of the reader or the writer. It analyses a poem into its component impulses, its 'archetypal patterns', and examines the words as generators of those impulses in the mind of the reader. In assessing artistic values it tends towards the radical relativism of Hamlet's 'there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.' In interpreting a poem it follows the lead of its chief exponent, Dr. I. A. Richards, who rejects the traditional, rational method of interpretation as the 'one meaning fallacy' and contends that a poem

can legitimately mean different things to different readers. While such a tentative, exploratory, hypothetical method of interpretation may reveal unsuspected pregnancies of meaning in a poem, it threatens to dissolve the poem into an airy nothing, an idle, freakish, verbal kaleidoscope.

The last group of critical types centres round different conceptions of the ultimate values of literature. *Didactic criticism* assumes that literature aims at moral instruction, at making men better in some respect, and judges a work of art by the moral effect it produces on the reader. Usually it gives an absolute and transcendental validity to the moral code of a particular society or a particular class and seeks to impose it on all writers and writings. Thus Ruskin applied to all literature and all art the yardstick of Victorian morality and Plato judged the poets by his own ideals of stoic heroism. While moral considerations undoubtedly play an important part in the process of evaluating and judging literature, an exclusive concern with them misleads the critic into exalting moral platitudes to an undeserved position of artistic excellence. Irreproachable moral convictions and noble ideals do not by themselves refine crude, insipid, hackneyed writing: moral conscience is distinct from artistic conscience. The art of literature is the art of digesting into words the writer's perception of value in life. *Aesthetic Criticism* claims for literature a place apart from life and a function distinct from the functions of ordinary, practical human activities. It supports the theory of 'art for art's sake' and suggests that the cultivation of beauty, the perception and enjoyment of it through the medium of language should be the main objective of the literary artist.

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It waives aside moral considerations as irrelevant to the artist's preoccupation with the beautiful. It assumes the existence of a special aesthetic emotion—at once a consciousness of beauty and an intense, pure delight welling out of that consciousness—something akin to the beatitude, the sense of spiritual well-being and happiness that some religions refer to, and judges the excellence of works of art by the degree to which they move the reader to experience that emotion. Like music, literature in its pure form will have nothing to do with thought, meaning, philosophy, outlook on life: it will seek, by artistic weaving of verbal patterns, emotive use of imagery, to stimulate the sense and impart the experience of beauty to the reader. Beauty is considered to be an absolute value, not measurable in terms of truth or morality. Such a conception of literature and its objective is unreal because it ignores the fact that poems and other works of literary art which are acknowledged to be masterpieces by aesthetic critics do have an intelligible meaning, do say something thought-provoking about important aspects of human life. Our sense of the value of these poems undeniably takes account of the light which they seem to throw on the problems of life, the power which they have of lifting from our minds 'the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world'. Such an inclusive, all-round conception of the value of literature, a realisation that a poem is not just a beautiful pattern, that 'it means intensely and it means good', informs and radiates out of *Evaluative Criticism*. While it keeps itself in touch with the words on the page which build up the poem, it seeks to evaluate the poem by the quality of its 'criticism of life'. It neither mistakes literature

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for life nor does it take literature to be an escape from life. It knows that the literary artist must possess both an experiencing nature and an expressive art, an ability to use language at once for exploring life and for defining the results of that exploration. It transcends the unreal though occasionally convenient distinction between form and content and feels the pulse of a poem's life in the throbbing vitality of the sequence of words on the page. In evaluating literature it takes account of all the elements which, creatively mixed, form literature : questions of rhythm and movement, thought and emotion, imagery and suggestion, words and meanings, philosophy and outlook on life are appropriately tackled by it in the process of final valuation.



## CHAPTER VI

### CRITICISM AND CREATION



Before considering the nature of literature and examining the various problems that grow out of that inquiry, it will be convenient to deal with the much discussed problem of the relations between the creation of literature and criticism of literature. There is the view that creation and criticism are opposed, conflicting, mutually exclusive types of activity carried on by two distinct types of minds ; the corollary of this view is drawn in the theory that literary history shows an alternation of critical ages and creative ages, analogous to the dialectical movement of history according to Hegelian philosophy. There is the counter view that criticism and creation are co-ordinate and complementary activities of a single type of mind, viz., the literary mind ; the corresponding reading of literary history finds no evidence for the hypothesis of a bifurcation between creative and critical ages ; it rather points to the conclusion that the creation and criticism of literature tend to flourish and fade together. A slightly different point of view from which the problem has been considered takes into account the different estimates of the relative status of the critic and the creative writer. To some the critic appears to be a parasite who feeds on and defiles the work of the creative artist. Others hold the view that the two



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are equal and co-ordinate in status and each has his work cut out for him. A few place the critic on a pedestal, crown him a law-giver in the kingdom of letters and expect the creative writer to obey the laws. Others again insist that the creative writer alone is qualified to discharge the critical function. It is necessary to examine these conflicting opinions and arrive at some points of agreement.

The theory of two distinct mental types is based partly on the facts of literary history and partly on the observed differences between the creative and critical processes. On the one hand it is pointed out that some great critics like Aristotle, Longinus, Dr. Johnson, I. A. Richards either did not try their hand at creative writing or did not attain distinction therein ; on the other hand it is noted that great creative writers like Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, Hardy contributed little or nothing at all to literary criticism ; and the conclusion is sought to be drawn that the two sorts of excellence, critical and creative, count each other out. The first thing to be done in the name of fairness is to compile a list of names esteemed in both spheres of activity : Dante, Ben Jonson, Dryden, Coleridge, Goethe, Arnold, T. S. Eliot make a bead-roll of writers who are memorable both as poets and as critics. If so many were able to combine creative and critical powers of a high order, there cannot in the nature of things be anything antipathetic in the two types of activities. Nor was there in the careers of most of them a clear-cut division into a creative phase and a critical phase : Dryden's critical prefaces alternated with his creative works ; Goethe's conversations with Eckermann coincided at least partly with the composition of the second part of

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*Faust*. Coleridge indeed wrote the *Biographia Literaria* long after the suspension of his 'shaping spirit of imagination'; but the seminal ideas of his criticism germinated in the spring-time of his poetic career when he and the two Wordsworths eagerly discussed poetic problems during their fruitful rambles. Arnold undoubtedly is a crucial case: his creative work was practically over when he started upon his *Essays in Criticism*. But Arnold, as T. S. Eliot suggests, did not occupy himself with literary criticism for any length of time either: in his 'critical' work he went 'outside of the literary preserve altogether', succumbed to the temptation 'to put literature into the corner until he cleared up the whole country first'. Of the critics mentioned in the first list, Dr. Johnson can be singled out for the poetic excellence of his *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*; of the writers in the second list, it need only be pointed out that Shakespeare gives us an illuminating account of poetic imagination in the well-known passage from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and a striking version of the theory of imitation in a passage from *Hamlet*, Milton is suggestive on the matter of blank verse technique, Blake is challenging in his attack on Aristotelian principles and classical models. All that can be gathered from the cases of critics like Aristotle and Richards and of creative writers like Hardy is that critical and creative activities can exist independently of one another; there is no evidence to support the theory of an antipathy between the two.

A more fundamental support is sought to be given to the theory by means of an analysis of the creative and critical activities. It is suggested that

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the creative writer seeks to bring things together, the critic is accustomed to take things apart; the one is engaged upon problems of synthesis, the other upon those of analysis. The poet starts with a crowded mind and a blank page. Multitudinous impressions from different levels and eras of experience are bobbing up and down on the current of his consciousness. They are partly verbal and partly neuro-muscular. The problem for the poet is to get them astride words which, as T. S. Eliot says,

“...strain,  
Crack, and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still”.

He has to play the instability of his impressions against the imprecision of words, admit the ‘enormous incompleteness’ of his knowledge of reality and yet get on to the page by means of the verbal medium a few glimpses of the pattern of reality. Like all persons engaged in creative activities he cannot afford to be squeamish, a stickler for perfection; he must put up with many approximations and second-bests; he must be tentative, experimental, adjustable, in his strivings to effect a synthesis of the discordant and apparently incompatible elements of his experience, to create a relatively stable order out of the chaos of his mental impressions. The critic, on the other hand, does not have to soil his cuffs in the impurities of the unformed chaos. He has before him the rounded, perfected globe of the poem, the ordered pattern of words on the page, which he proceeds to decipher, to read and to judge in the light of other patterns and exemplars which are ready to his hand. He will

analyse the poem into its parts, break up the order of words into its elements in order to know and weigh the stuff it is made of. He is like a swimmer with one hand on the life-buoy : the poem is always with him, to be punched and twisted and squeezed, but the more it changes under the critic's hand the more it is the same. He may try to explore the *terra incognita* of the poet's mind in the act of composition : but as soon as he has a feeling of getting lost, he can return to the actual poem and grasp it in his hands. The habit of dealing with definite, already composed pieces of writing incapacitates the critic to undertake creative writing on his own. The very subtlety and severity of his critical practice makes him ever more diffident of submitting himself to such an ordeal : rather than be found wanting by his own standards he would not allow himself to be weighed for the test of artistic composition. The logic of specialisation drives a wedge between creative and critical writings and disables the expert in one line for good work in the other line.

There is something to be said for this contention on the plank of common sense. In literature as in other spheres of human activity few can attain pre-eminence in all types of work. Even those who have the capacity to shine everywhere must make their choice and limit their ambition to some particular kind of excellence. A man will congratulate himself on having mastered the technique of a particular craft : he will be reluctant to dissipate his energy by dabbling in numerous trades. And yet, there is such a close affinity and bloodkinship between creative and critical writings that mastery in one kind of writing should facilitate the attainment of mastery in the other. The

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multitudinous impressions which impel a poet to creative composition include impressions gathered from his vivid, vital and discerning study of the work of other poets. After all, the most original poet originates from his predecessors in the art of poetry, has watched them at work and has scrutinised their work, has felt and estimated its greatness and value. The higher his stature as creative artist, the more critical he is likely to be of the artistry of his predecessors and exemplars, the more dissatisfied with their methods and achievements, the more eager to embark upon new experiments and blaze out new orientations on his own. Critical discernment does not impede creative activity but directs it along right lines. The counterpart of this theory should be equally acceptable. A critic sets out to interpret, to enjoy, to evaluate poetry : at each stage of his critical study, the experience of composing poetry, a personal knowledge of how it feels to write a poem will give him depth and balance, a sense of realities and an eye for genuine excellence. While it is broadly true that in some sense poets are born and critics are made, even a little poetic practice goes a long way in the making of a critic. It gives him an insight into the processes of the creative mind, an inside knowledge of the aims and methods of the literary artist : an insight and knowledge which equip him to interpret correctly, appreciate discriminatingly and evaluate justly. The creative and critical faculties are logically distinct but psychologically interfused : the theory of an incompatibility between them is not grounded in the facts of literary history nor supported by an analysis of their respective working.

The correlated view that there is an alternation

of creative and critical ages in the history of literature is equally unsound. It is usual to point to the Elizabethan age and the Augustan age in English literature for a confirmation of this view. The Elizabethan renaissance was the flowering time of creative literature: the drama and the lyric in particular flourished with a brilliance they never attained later. But the critical literature of the age was callow, unbalanced and scanty. On the other hand the Augustan age was great and glorious in its critical achievements, but flat, stale and unprofitable in its creative literature. This view looks imposing in its large abstraction; but it dissolves into a mirage on closer inspection. The English renaissance produced at least one great critic, Ben Jonson, who was also a great creative, artist, and a number of talented critics like sir Philip Sidney, Puttenham, Campion and Daniel who gave birth to English criticism and began to lick it into shape. Three of them were lyrical poets of rare charm and artistry. The Augustan age has to its credit one great poet, Pope, a number of estimable poets like Goldsmith and Dr. Johnson, a band of novelists who developed a new literary form and raised it to a high level of artistic attainment and great masters of literary prose like Swift, Addison, Gibbon, Burke and others. The age of the Romantic Revival which succeeded the Augustan age won new laurels in both the fields: Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats are great critics as well as great poets. (The quality of Keat's critical refinement can be appreciated in his letters.) A dispassionate study of literary history seems to point to the conclusion that creative and critical abilities flourish and fade together, a conclusion which appeals to common

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sense. It stands to reason that those who take the literary art seriously, who practise it and are eager to develop and perfect it are likely to judge the quality and value of works of that art more adequately and discriminatingly than those who know it at a distance and at second hand. Ben Jonson only gave too dogmatic and extreme a version of the truth when he said, "To judge of poets is only the faculty of poets ; and not of all poets, but the best."

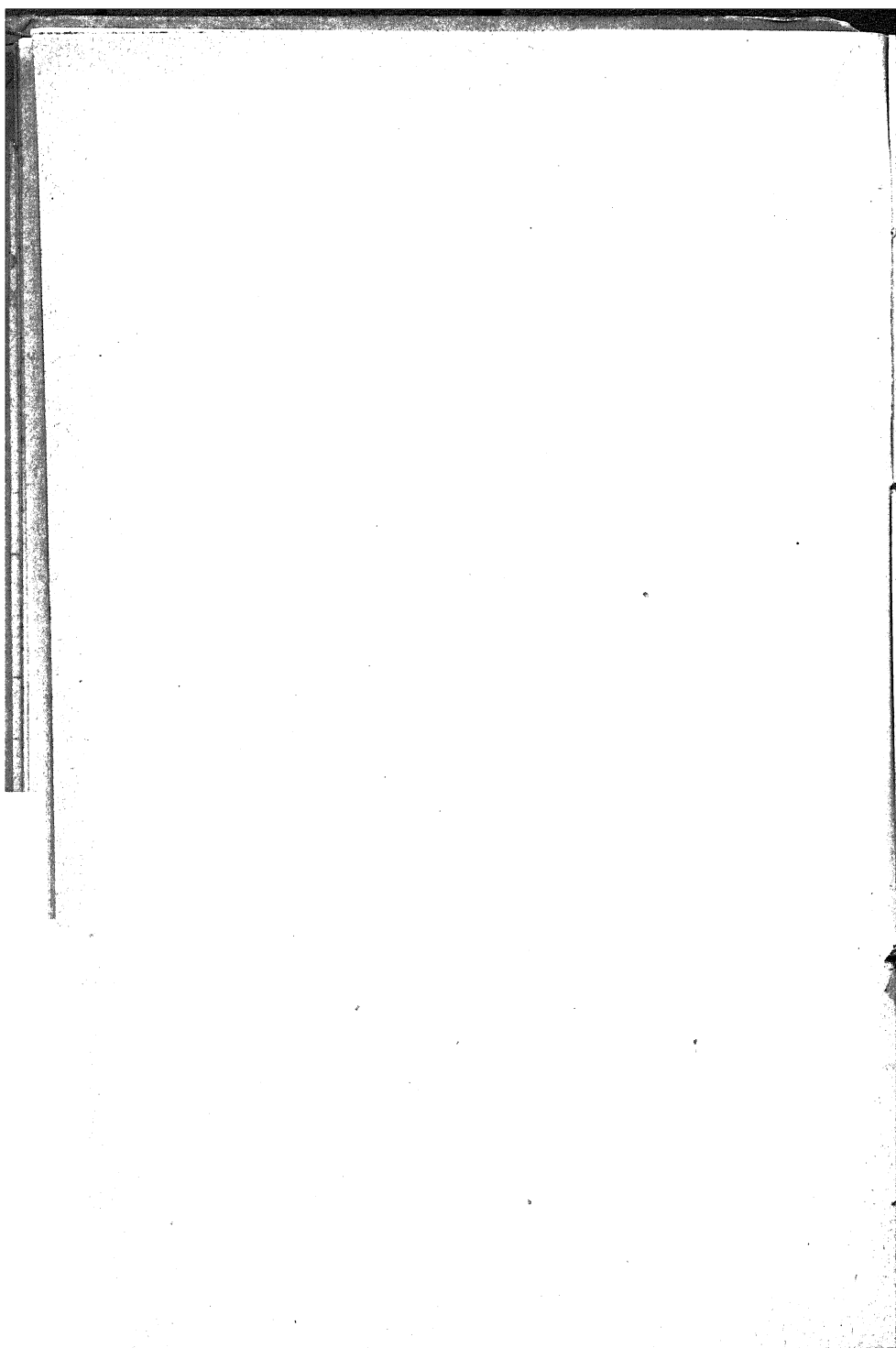
A brief reference to the different estimates of the relative status of poets and critics will lead to a similar conclusion. Those who condemn the critic as a parasite and nuisance, as a minion of the malignant goddess who lolls on numberless half-devoured books are probably erecting personal spite into a perverse theory. It is of course obvious that the critic cannot get to work until the poet has provided him with works of art. But the critic has a function distinct from and as honourable as that of the poet. The latter seeks to digest into words his perception of the charm and wonder and value of life : the former sets the verbal digest for comparative study against other poems of achieved and recognised artistry and value. The poet is liable to read into the poem a meaning which exists in his mind but which he has failed to get into the poem. The critic, approaching the poem with an open mind, will take and assess what the externalised poem, the words on the page, give and say : the mute poem in the mind of the poet is inaudible to him and will not swerve his judgment. His work, if properly done, has a two-fold utility ; on the one hand he will help the common reader to read the poem adequately and take its meaning justly, on the other hand he will make available to the poet an independent, external,

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impartial estimate of his own handiwork, give him eyes to see the poem as others see it.

While the critic can undoubtedly be helpful to the poet it is a monstrous absurdity to exalt the critic to the position of a lawgiver commanding and exacting the poet's allegiance. The poet enjoys the creator's privilege of being a law unto himself. He owes allegiance only to his own vision of life : he learns the technique of his craft, not from the rules laid down by the critic, but from his own critical, comparative, personal study of literary masterpieces. His manual will be the plays of Sophocles rather than the *poetics* of Aristotle, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *King Lear* rather than Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Art kindles art and experience evokes expression. The critic can facilitate study, he cannot teach the poet to compose poetry.





## CHAPTER VII

### LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE

After an indication of the nature and functions of literary criticism, a realisation of its scope and an enumeration of its main problems, it will be appropriate to deal with the group of topics connected with the *nature of literature*. After all, the first duty of the literary critic is to ask and answer the question, 'What is literature?' He has to form and fix a working idea of literature which can later be used as a standard of reference for estimating the literary value of different pieces of writing.

That simplest of all definitions of poetry—'the best words in the best order'—points to and starts from the most obvious fact about literature: it is written in language and consists of words arranged in a certain order. The relation between language and literature is not formal or external, like that between the glove and the hand or the ornaments and the body: it is organic and vital, like that between the body and the soul or the plant and the flower. In the oft-repeated words of F. R. Leavis, literature is not merely *in* a language but *of* a language: it is the result of a particular use of language. Language is the medium of the literary artist, the vehicle for the conveyance of his meaning. Whatever else he is doing, the great literary artist is always searching for the right, inevitable word, the *mot juste*, 'the one

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word for the one thing, the one thought, amid the multitude of words, terms, that might just do': he is above all a connoisseur of words, the creator of a verbal universe.

Language has to attain a certain age of maturity before it is capable of bearing literary fruit. So long as it is just a spoken dialect, exclusively used by the people for a utilitarian purpose, a system of generally intelligible symbols which facilitates co-operation and mutual understanding among them in the business of holding their own in the struggle for existence, it has not developed the detachment, the complexity, the speculative subtlety and imaginative suggestiveness indispensable to a literary medium. Originally, language had a survival value for a group of humans handicapped by their physical weakness in the 'war of all against all'. The potentialities of their superior intelligence were realised by means of language. The physical capacity of emitting cries and voicing vocables, the intellectual capacity of utilising them to express already-formed thoughts and intentions and to mould, refine and diversify unformed, crude or simple ideas and conceptions developed together by mutual action and reaction. The developing intellect refined upon language and language gave sharp definition to inchoate and unformed thought. As the pressure and urgency of the problems of mere living decreased, thought was set free to follow the lead of curiosity and make voyages of discovery into the unknown. Men asked questions both about themselves and about the world they lived in; they observed similarities and differences, traced analogies, brought far and near, past and present in a single view. They could perform these complicated

intellectual operations only through the medium of language which was at once stabilised and subtilised in the process. While the intellectual was in close touch with the practical, literature was not marked off from religion, philosophy, geography, history and the rest. *The Rigveda* is an outstanding example of a verbal medley which is everything by turns : sacrificial procedure, historical annals and references, prayers and hymns to gods and aspects of nature, cosmology, ethical code and social philosophy, are mixed and intermeddled, and often touched with poetic beauty in a way that baffles the pigeon-holing critic. In default of an extensive vocabulary the words in *The Rigveda* are worked and over-worked in different contexts and at cross purposes : there is a corresponding anarchy in syntax and uncertainty of interpretation. Vagueness of thought and imprecision of language inbreed and generate each other under the sinister shadow of death round the corner.

The disappearance of that shadow after the attainment of comparative social stability sets the mind free to explore the universe, meditate on nature and man, life and death, by lifting them up from the practical to the contemplative plane, couching their 'film of familiarity and selfish solicitude.' Literature is the mapping of those explorations and the voicing of those meditations by means of the instrument of language. The detachment of meditation from practical life and the detachment of language from the bonds and purposes of the will to live take effect simultaneously. In the context of office and factory and market place—the characteristic modern context—words are blunted and vulgarised and defaced like coins in excessive circulation. The language of commercial advertisements and political

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propaganda furnishes glaring and notorious instances of this debasement. Literature touches language to finer issues, re-mints the words and stamps them with new denominations and new lettering.

A concrete example can show the process at work : here is a characteristic stanza from Donne, a poet who knew the secret of working words to their utmost capacities :—

“ And now good morrow to our waking souls,  
Which watch not one another out of fear ;  
For love, all love of other sights controls,  
And makes one little room, an every where  
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,  
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and  
is one.”

The conventional, familiar value of the ordinary form of greeting ‘good morrow’ gives a reality to the ‘*waking souls*’, while, in return, the freshness and wonder of the souls newly *awakened* to a first experience of love reflects a surprising significance on the ‘good morrow’. The *waking souls* are like sentinels on the *watch* : they never cease to look at each other and yet there is no suspicion or *fear* in the *watch* they keep on each other. *Fear* at the end of the first line leads on to *love* at the beginning of the third : the *waking souls* can see many *sights*, but the sovereignty of love turns them from other sights and fixes them upon each other. The multiple affiliations and manifold suggestiveness of the words in these three lines, the way in which they grow out of and link up with one another, the durable and yet flexible web of meaning that they weave can be felt and appreciated by the attentive reader. The fourth line takes up the theme at a slightly different

point : love is so self-centred and so oblivious of the rest of the world that 'it makes one little room'—the room in which the souls have just awakened after snorting 'in the seven sleepers' den' of the first stanza—'an every where' : it is the whole world to them. The contrast between the 'little room' and the 'every where' and the large, limitless expanse suggested by the latter word is developed and expanded into the imagery of Elizabethan voyaging in the next two lines and the expression of the lovers' complete self absorption in the last line. The thrill of new discovery in the physical world—'new worlds', 'worlds on worlds',—vibrates with greater intensity in the thrill of new discovery in the spiritual—'each hath one, and is one'. Moreover, while the sea-discoverers only *go* to the new worlds and are *shown* worlds on maps, the lovers *possess* their world and embody it : the pregnant sparseness of language in the last half-line gives a surprising sense of the world of significance which the lovers find in one another.

If we consider the nature of the words used—words which are the units of language—we must admit that the language of the poem does not appreciably differ from the language of everyday life. There is not a single word that is out of the way, that belongs to 'poetic diction' or weaves a magic spell. And yet, in the poem the words build up a context and shape a meaning which is larger and deeper than that of everyday life. For one thing, there are the *intellectual-emotional associations* of the words and expressions : 'good morrow' and 'waking souls' in conjunction set up the whole context of awakening, the freshness and light of the morning, the revival of consciousness which is at once spiritual

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and neuro-physical, the Christian concept of souls rising from the graves at the call of Christ and waking into eternal life—a context relevant to the novelty, wonder and rapture of the first experience of love. These elements of thought and emotion are both reinforced and stabilised by the *imagery* of sea-discovery, the finding of new worlds, the eager consultation of maps, the vision of worlds on worlds which kindles imagination. Imagery is one of the most potent forces by means of which 'heterogeneous ideas' and originally unconnected aspects of experience are welded into unity and brought into fruitful intercourse. But it is useful to remember that the imagery which is relevant here is not just picturesqueness or word-painting or sensuous fullness. The lines in the poem dealing with sea-discovery are not picturesque, although they contain pictorial and sensuous elements. The art of the poet lies in utilising these elements to develop the theme, the thought and emotion of the poem: or rather, the bud of thought unfolds itself into these petals which centripetally lead back to the core. There is, further, the use of various *rhetorical devices*—a subtler and less conventional use than that which satisfies the needs of oratory and the arts of persuasion. The subtle effect of punning due to the utilisation of the different shades of meaning given by a word like *love*—'For *love*, all *love* of other sights controls—', the surprise of paradox in 'makes one little room, an every where', the traces of biblical parallelism in the last three lines with their 'Let... Let... Let', the epigrammatic concision of the last line, 'Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one':—these are some of the rhetorical elements which give an intellectual suppleness, an athletic

quality to the poem. The tradition of rhetoric in poetry and other forms of literature is ancient and fruitful; the intellectual self-consciousness and the command of the language medium implied in rhetoric are valuable elements of the literary art. Distinct from the art of playing on words is the art of *placing them in positions of stress and emphasis*. It is not by the loudness of the words themselves as by their positions that Donne has secured emphasis on key-words and ideas. The waking and wonder of new love, which is the theme of the poem, is given wing and flight by means of natural accent and emphasis falling on 'waking souls' at the end of the first line. In the next line, which dispels a possible ambiguity, 'watch' at the beginning and 'fear' at the end get the necessary emphasis by their position. Closely connected with *stress by position* is the wider and deeper significance of *rhythm* and, in the case of poetry, of *metre*. Language is naturally rhythmic: it attracts and holds attention by the modulation, the rise and fall of accent and sound which is a characteristic feature of spoken idiom. The relief secured by rhythm is capable of provoking thought and exciting emotion as well as of echoing both. Thus, the thrill of the infinite possibilities of discovering new worlds is partly created and partly conveyed by the rhythmic movement of,

'Let máps to other, wórlds on wórlds have shówn',  
while the restfulness, placidity and blessed calm of perfect spiritual union can be read into and heard in the equable, gliding rhythm of the next line. Metre takes up the natural movements of rhythm and seeks to build them into a consciously and artistically conceived pattern of alliteration and alternation of accent and rhyme and line-length and the rest. How



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to impose the metrical pattern without destroying the idiosyncrasy and freedom of natural rhythm is one of the most delicate problems that the poet has to solve : that is why 'the sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it' is regarded by Coleridge as one of the characteristics of a man of poetic genius. The 'best order' in which the literary artist is expected to place the 'best words' is controlled by various considerations including, among others, the requirements of metre and rhythm.

Language thus reaches the limit of its capacity and actualizes its expressive potentialities in a typically literary use. Literature is the organization and perfection of language for the moulding, expression and communication of the artist's sense of life. Language can be used in many different ways and for many distinct purposes. It is a means of social intercourse for the needs of practical life. It is capable of being used for the purposes of scientific description, analysis, explanation and the rest in an impersonal, unemotional, unambiguous way. The lawyer, the scholiast, the philosopher, the orator, the preacher put language to different uses and avail themselves of its different powers. The literary artist, seeking to 'see life steadily and to see it whole', cannot afford to confine himself to a particular aspect or power of language : he has occasions to utilise all the resources of language as he strives to compose a polyphonic structure of thought and emotion, to 'reconcile the head with the heart'.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LITERATURE AND LIFE

If language is the medium of literature, the material in which it embodies itself, life is its subject matter, the burden of its song. Literature says something and means something, it is *about* something : in a large sense, life is what it is about. It is common to say that life is the raw material on which it imposes an artistic form and out of which it creates the finished work of art. The ambiguity resulting from the practice of referring to both language and life as the *material* of literature is not a material ambiguity. It is easily understood that a poem is an arrangement or sequence of words which convey thoughts and emotions to the reader. The poet's art consists in arranging and organizing the words in such a way that they build up a pattern of meaning, a pattern which is intended to body forth the meaning of life as the poet understands it.

For the poet is not just toying and fiddling with words, like Horace in Dekkers' *Satiromastix*. He is a man living among men, fascinated and moved by their joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, actions and passions. He is alert and alive, inquisitive and meditative. Of course, like everybody else, he has his own life to live. The business of earning a living, building up a home, centring himself in a cricle of friends and striving to satisfy a thousand private

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needs and desires will engage his attention and make unremitting demands on his abilities. He will have his vanities and nobilities, his friendships and enmities, his merits and foibles. Like Shylock he can justifiably say, "If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" And yet, all these preoccupations of his private life are mostly irrelevant to the interests which build themselves into his poetry. Those critics and moralists who take the high didactic line and insist that the great poet must be a godly liver, who visit the sins of Marlowe the man upon the works of Marlowe the poet, are the victims of a great misconception. They are incapable of appreciating the point of T. S. Eliot's remark that "... the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates". They confuse the life of the poem with the life of the poet.

Matthew Arnold's phrase, 'the criticism of life', goes to the root of the matter. Literature is one of the trails blazed by the human spirit 'voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone'. After the needs of daily life are satisfied man follows the lead of curiosity and explores the mysteries of life. The passion for knowledge, the desire to understand life and to make himself at home in the universe has a perennial spring in human nature. By the side of the acquisitive instinct there exists the inquisitive instinct. Science is the record of some of the discoveries made in the course of these explorations, philosophy and literature record some others. All three are expressions of man's intellectual being and are covered by that inclusive definition of

Schiller : "Literature is the comprehensive essence of the intellectual life of a nation."

Literature deals with life but it is not an *imitation* of life, a copy of the real world. If it holds the mirror up to nature, it has already discriminated between virtue and vice, it has evolved a clear idea of the 'form and pressure' of the age and body of the time. It sees life and sees into life, it seeks to attain a Pisgah-sight, a *vishvarupadarshana* (विश्वरूप-दर्शन). And it is only when, like Arjuna, the literary artist hangs back from the battle of life in a trance of meditative perception, that he attains a vision which is at once picturesque, interpretative and evaluative. He has to practise the *yoga* of self-effacement, of impersonality. He has to lose himself in order to find the meaning of life. Even when he writes in the first person he does not want to be merely personal. When Wordsworth tells us,

"...For I have learned

To look on Nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth ; but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity,  
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
To chasten and subdue,"

he is not primarily interested in communicating to us a piece of autobiography but in suggesting to us a point of view for seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. He doesn't want to place himself in the centre : he wants to place Nature and humanity in the centre.

That is characteristically the way of the literary artist. He has the power—a native gift which he has developed by conscious and systematic practice—of detaching his mind from the pre-occupations of practical life and focussing it upon minute parti-

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culars or large horizons of experience which seem to be pregnant with meaning, which radiate the light of understanding on the mysteries and dark places of life. Out of multitudinous life he fishes up a moment—the flashing green of a blade of grass, the faint tracery of sorrow on a human face, the half-remembered refrain of a forgotten song—and works it ‘into something rich and strange’. He knows, with Blake, how

“To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a Heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour”.

It is this ‘full surprise and elevation of a new experience of poetry’, the feeling it gives of restoring to life ‘the sparkle and the dewdrops’, which moves T. S. Eliot to object to the frigidity of Arnold’s phrase, ‘a criticism of life’. But that is a phrase which emphasises the fact that the literary artist exercises all the faculties of his mind in a strenuous effort to understand life and evaluate its aspects. The sparkle and the elevation are the psychological concomitants of successful effort. When a poem like Hopkins’s *The Wreck of the Deutschland* or a passage like “Ay, but to die, and go we know not where” in *Measure for Measure* moves us, it moves us to think as well as to feel, it makes us ponder on the possibilities of life and the realities of human nature, its glow is the glow of dawning consciousness and illuminating vision.

The point in describing the poet as a *creative artist* is misunderstood when he is thought of as the creator of a ‘New Atalantis’, of a land of the heart’s desire. Dr. Bradley made himself liable to such a misunderstanding when he said of poetry: “its

nature is to be, not a part nor yet a copy of the real world, as we commonly understand the phrase, but to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous. To possess it fully, you must enter that world, conform to its laws, and ignore, for the time being, the beliefs, aims and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality." A good deal of romantic literature employs the magic and music of language for the creation of a dream—world, the building up of an ivory tower insulated and cut off from this earth 'where men sit and hear each other groan.' It is the literature of *escape from life*, of wish-fulfilment and make-belief, indulging in us a forgetfulness which dislimns the realities of life. There is undoubtedly a place for this kind of literature in the scheme of human culture. The depressing realisation which paralyses Hamlet—

"How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!"—,  
the nightmare vision of man as 'nasty, mean, brutish and short' which demented Swift, would fling us into the Valley of the Shadow of Death unless the gleam of the ideal—

"For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!"  
beckoned us on to hope and heroic effort. As Bacon put it in his pregnant phrase, "It (i.e. Poesy) doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind." A rounded conception of literature would include both a familiarity with the dark and stark realities as well as the capacity to catch the visionary gleam and a passage from the one to the other: "tamaso ma jyotir gamaya" तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय (from Darkness to night).

But an addiction to the romantic habit of blowing

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bubble-worlds of fancy is fatal to the creative art of literature. While it is true that the world to which Lear or Macbeth belongs is 'not a part nor yet a copy of the real world', it must be remembered that the value of Shakespeare's tragedies derives from the reader's conviction that Shakespeare has illumined the dark places of human nature and revealed some of the secrets of the real world. Thus, *King Lear* is an exploration of the infinite possibilities of human nature and human life. There is, on the one hand, the harrowing spectacle of ingratitude, the marble-hearted fiend, hideously embodied in Goneril and Regan, and on the other hand the vision of spotless purity and selfless love that is Cordelia—'Thou art a soul in bliss.' Above all, there is Lear himself, stretched out to the last moment of life 'upon the rack of this tough world', living through and almost outliving the strange, sudden, nerve-shaking changes and chances of human destiny: in the beginning, the fiery, imperious king snapping at Kent, 'Come not between the dragon and his wrath'; later, the disillusioned and helpless old father arguing with his fiendish daughters: 'O, reason not the need: our basest beggars Are in the poorest things superfluous'; later still, the wanderer on the heath, seeing the light of truth through the medium of madness:—

"Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,  
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,  
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,  
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend  
you

From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en  
Too little care of this!";  
the jail-bird of Hell, 'bound Upon a wheel of fire',

As if we were God's spies ..."  
and, last of all, the bowed and bent mourner of  
Cordelia :

"Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,  
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no  
more,

Never, never, never, never, never!"

These are not airy nothings, not just verbal filigree  
work : they are of the flesh and blood of veined  
humanity, they define and reveal man's spiritual  
malaise—'thou ailest here and here'. Created out  
of linguistic material, built out of words, they have  
the power of transporting the reader beyond the  
words into the 'the life of things'.

That is the breath and mystery of creative  
writing. Just as the Creator impregnates dust with  
the spark of life and informs the body with the soul,  
the literary maker takes words which are dead and  
common as dust and impregnates them with his  
vision and wisdom of life. He is both a seer and an  
artificer : his search for the right, inevitable word  
and word-order is simultaneously an exploration of  
the mysterious universe and mystifying experience.  
By selecting, synthesising, modifying, varying,  
harmonizing elements out of the Heracleitian flux of  
life, by defining, stabilizing and fixing them in the  
medium of language, he shapes and creates a vision  
which reflects his conception and perception of the  
meaning and value of life. What he has created is a  
rounded and perfected artifact, not a 'slice of life' :  
but the rounder and more perfect the artifact, the



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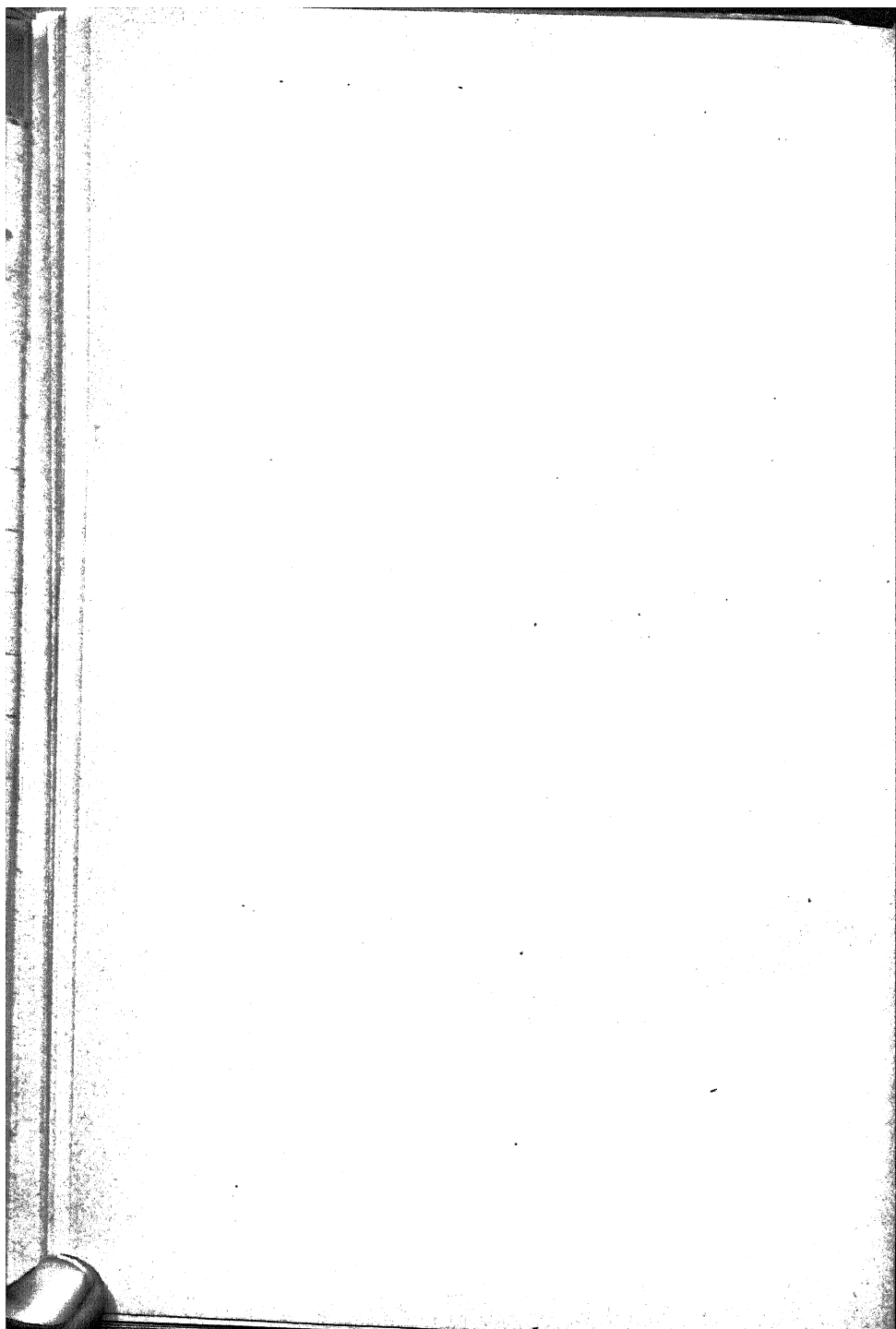
larger and more numerous will be the slices of life out of which the artificer has squeezed the juice. The created work of art must in some sense be true to life ; it must be at once a vision and an interpretation of life, an 'escape into life'.

The work of art, the poem or the play which is shaped by the selective, *esemplastic* process of poetic creation will possess qualities of organization, unity, 'beautiful significance', artistic economy which 'remove it and to a distance that is fit' from the blinding and formless chaos of actual life. What Dr. Bradley wants to convey by his definition of the world of poetry as 'a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous' is just this architectural quality of literature. He wants to remind readers and critics that the characters and incidents in a play or a novel, the thoughts and feelings in a poem are not to be placed naively alongside of those in actual, day-to-day life or measured by the yardstick of records in an Annual Register. The dominant literary conventions of the day, the dramatic and impersonal nature of literary utterance, the symbolic significance of the elements in a poetic composition, the emotive and suggestive use of language in poetry —these and other differentiae of literature must be taken into account before questions of the life-likeness of *Othello* or the credibility of *Lear* are settled. Rymers' notorious attack on *Othello* as a tissue of historical falsities and psychological absurdities is based upon a monstrous misconception of the nature of poetic drama. Neither Shakespeare nor his audience ever intended or took *Othello* to be a replica of a historically authentic Moorish general in the service of the Venetian State. Within the framework of the play which symbolised some of the tragic

possibilities of human destiny, Othello embodied some of the permanent elements and passions of human nature. He is not just a Moorish general or a jealous husband : he is a poetic symbol of man at the mercy of his nature, in the hands of his environment. When, in the very rage and storm of jealousy, he fouls Desdemona with filth—

“ Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,  
Made to write whore upon ? What committed !  
Committed !—O thou public Commoner !  
Impudent strumpet ”—

his ‘only begetter’ Shakespeare is not just gratuitously and monstrously belying the character and dignity of a soldier and an exalted military commander or insulting the commonsense of readers and spectators, as Rymer seems to suggest : he is utilising the conventions of Elizabethan drama and the norms of poetic speech to express a strong revulsion against certain possibilities of human nature and human experience. Unless the literary artist can count upon and facilitate ‘a willing suspension of disbelief’ on the part of the reader, his art will be dumb and ineffective. He can legitimately expect the reader at once to distinguish between a statement of facts and an expression of ‘the imaginative sense of facts’ and to discern the golden chain which links the world of art to the world of everyday reality.



## CHAPTER IX

### LITERATURE AND SCIENCE

There is a plane of thought on which both literature and science can be regarded as the products of man's endeavour to understand and interpret the world of which he is an inhabitant. Biological necessity and intellectual curiosity equally drive him to speculative and exploratory activities the results of which are embodied in literary and scientific writings. While it is intelligible that the father of modern science, Lord Bacon, emphasises the element of fiction or feigning in literature and warns his readers, "But it is not good to stay too long in the theatre", it must be pointed out that fiction or feigning is not to the poet an end in itself but only a means to an end. The poet's fiction, like the chemist's formula, is an artificial construction intended to convey truth. If the scientist is inspired by a passion for knowledge, a desire to see things as they are, to understand the nature of the universe around us, the poet also can rightly claim to be a seeker after the light of truth which lightens 'the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world' and enables man to 'see into the life of things.' The pathways of literature, like the pathways of science, lead to the temple of truth. The traditional view of the poet as the *vates* or the seer does justice to the serious and responsible function of literature

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in human civilization. The poet is not merely telling a delightful tale 'which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner': he is trekking after 'knowledge infinite':—

“On a huge hill,  
Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and he that  
will

Reach her, about must, and about must go ;  
And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so.”

The scientist and the poet are not only united in the pursuit of truth as a common goal, they share many attributes in common. If the scientist is admitted to be impersonal and objective in his search and research, impersonality and objectivity are marked out as the characteristics of great poetry. There is Goethe's insistence that “Poetry of the highest type manifests itself as altogether objective ; when once it withdraws itself from the external world to become subjective it begins to degenerate”. There is the complementary statement of T. S. Eliot that “The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. . . Poetry . . . is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.” Science, advancing from the particular to the general, from concrete instances to abstract laws, claims universality for the ‘laws of nature’ which it has discovered. The scientist is a student of the universe around us as well as of the universe within us ; it is his ambition to reach conclusions of universal validity. Correspondingly it has been the tradition of literary criticism from Aristotle onwards to speak of the universality of literature, to insist that the minute particulars of the poet have a universal significance—that they are a way of holding ‘infinity in the

palm of your hand'. Dr. Johnson's view that "the business of a poet is to examine, not the individual, but the species, to remark general properties and large appearances", his estimation of the greatness of poetry by reference to 'the grandeur of generality' is only too literal a version of the universality of literature. Those theories of literature which emphasise the element of form in poetry, which explain creative art as a patterning of experience can be applied to science as well, which is pre-eminently an endeavour to impose an order and a pattern on the flux and chaos of phenomena. Finally, the arbitrariness and inadequacy of De Quincey's familiar distinction between 'the literature of knowledge' and 'the literature of power' is brought home to us by the fact that the labels can be interchanged and yet be found to be applicable: knowledge of life, the feel and pulse of life is just what the great poet seeks to contemplate and to create by means of the verbal medium; the poet, no less than the scientist, explores reality with intent to know. Even more obviously, science which has placed at our disposal the fateful potentialities of atomic energy can with perfect propriety be characterised as the literature of power. Finally, the dictum of common sense that 'knowledge is power' makes the proposed distinction indistinct.

A more suitable starting-point for clarifying our conceptions of literature and science is the recognition that while science is an attempt to understand things as they are in themselves, literature seeks to relate them to human nature and human culture. Of course, in an ultimate sense, science itself is conditioned by the nature of the human intellect and represents the world-picture as seen through the

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spectacles of the human brain. Coleridge is fundamentally sound when he says,

“O Lady! we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does nature live.”

A conceivable scientist of some species different from *homo sapiens* is almost certain to form hypotheses and conceptions about the nature and structure of the universe which will not be acceptable to the human scientist. But leaving aside the all-important epistemological problem, we can say in the language of common sense that the scientist is conscientiously trying to investigate into the nature of phenomena, of things in themselves, to establish the laws of their mutual relationships and the principles of their order, to trace the lines of their organization into a universe which embraces the stars in their courses and atomic structures in their microscopic niceties. While as an individual he will be familiar with the experience of being stirred to emotional life, to moral and metaphysical reflection by the sights and sounds of the physical world, it will be his rigorous endeavour as a scientist to disentangle himself from these eminently human preoccupations and attend to phenomena as they exist in their own right, not as they are coloured by the passions, ideals and longings of men. The matter-of-factness of Peter Bell will be a deliberately adopted technique of thought to him :

“A primrose by the river’s brim  
A yellow primrose was to him  
And it was nothing more.”

How potent is the temptation for the scientist, who has sighted for the first time the wonders and marvels of the starry universe on the one hand and the myriad crowding of life in a drop of water on

the other to grow lyrically ecstatic or metaphysically contemplative about the revelation that has flashed upon him can be sensed in the writings of Sir James Jeans and Sir Arthur Eddington. It was the pre-eminently humanistic culture and human preoccupations of Lord Bacon which vitiated his scientific speculations. The scientist must exercise a supreme self-control and delimit himself to a kind of intellectual activity which ignores the particular needs and values of human life and human society. Even when he takes man's social or psychological life as an object of investigation, he seeks to examine it with the dispassionate and disinterested matter-of-factness with which he examines 'the meanest flower that blows' or studies the 'fearful symmetry' of the tiger. He places himself under the microscope, seeks to reduce his mental and social characteristics to scientific formulae. He will not, like G. M. Hopkins, say :

"O the mind, mind has mountains ; cliffs of fall  
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them  
cheap

May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our  
small

Durance deal with that steep or deep."

He will try to give a systematic, logically precise, objective analysis of the structure and functioning of the mind : to him the human mind is a fact of nature to be examined like other facts of nature—a vertebrate, a diamond, a spiral nebula or a magnetic field.

On the other hand the poet or the literary artist seeks to relate the facts of nature to aspects of human nature and facets of human culture. The context of human hopes and fears, loves and hatreds, ideals



and aspirations, joys and sorrows is the permanent context to which the poet refers every object, event or experience that has impressed itself upon his mind. To him man is the measure of all things, the very hub and centre of the wheel of life. Everything gravitates to that centre, is weighed and valued by that measure. Even when he writes about external facts, he is not concerned to tell us what they are in themselves, but rather what they mean and suggest to him, how they affect his personality and his consciousness, what experience, partly emotional, partly intellectual, partly sensory, they involve him in. 'He does not number the streaks of the tulip' or describe the structure of the daffodil. Wordsworth's descriptions of the 'host of golden daffodils,' — 'Continuous as the stars that shine And twinkle on the milky way', 'Fluttering and dancing in the breeze', 'they Outdid the sparkling waves in glee' tell us little about the flower as a botanical fact: but they enable us to participate in a human experience occasioned by a crowd of daffodils. The poet has seen, experienced and evaluated the daffodils in a fuller, deeper, more human way than the scientist: he has drawn more life, more joy, more meaning out of them than the scientist can ever draw—

"And then my heart with pleasure fills  
And dances with the daffodils."

While the scientist rigorously excludes many aspects of a natural, human response and confines himself to a narrow, specific kind of response—excludes emotions, ignores the sense of value and worthwhileness, cuts out the branching out into reflections and meditations,—the poet is anxious to develop the growing response — sensation, thought, emotion, contemplation — into an all-embracing *weltan-*

reads books in the running brooks and sermons in stones because he knows how to impregnate 'the inanimate cold world' of brooks and stones with the breath of human thought and passion. Newman describes him in a well-known passage: "The throng and succession of ideas, thoughts, feelings, imaginations, aspirations, which pass within him, the abstractions, the juxtapositions, the comparisons, the discriminations, the conceptions, which are so original in him, his views of external things, his judgments upon life, manners, and history, the exercises of his wit, of his humour, of his depth, of his sagacity, all these innumerable and incessant creations, the very pulsation and throbbing of his intellect, does he image forth ..."

The recognition of this fundamental distinction in the aims of science and literature, in the aspects of truth they respectively explore, facilitates the perception of the different uses to which language is put by the scientist and the poet. One of the vital points at which Dr. I. A. Richards has contributed to the development of literary criticism is the point connected with the two uses of language. In the light of his demonstration it is now clearly seen that the scientist and the poet, apparently using the same words and expressions, expressing themselves in a common language, are in reality putting different interpretations on words, manipulating them and ordering them differently—speaking, to all intents and purposes, in two different languages. The scientist,



striving to grasp things in their independent, autonomous existence, to understand their thinghood and essence apart from the purposes and valuations of men, aims at precision and accuracy of statement, logical arrangement of his findings and conclusions, rigorous avoidance of ambiguity and exclusion of emotional overtones and undertones. He seeks to give a fixed, determinate meaning to each word, just as the mathematician gives definite values to his symbols. What he wants to say is already clear to his mind: his experiments, explorations, observations, have enabled him to reach conclusions and fixed points. He now wants a language for stating them and arranging them logically—a language with units of meaning and mechanisms of expression as precise, efficient and dependable as the apparatus in his laboratory. Whenever it is possible, he uses signs and other methods of notation which have been invented especially to meet his requirements. But there is an amount of description, definition, narration, argument, explanation which cannot be managed without recourse to a linguistic medium. While using the language of daily intercourse for this purpose he frequently discovers that words and expressions trail a whole stream of associations, suggestions and emotional values which interfere with the purely logical, rigorously limited concepts he wants to express. That is why at the very beginning of the modern scientific movement the Royal Society placed the reform of language in the forefront of its programme. Thomas Sprat in his *History of the Royal Society* describes in memorable words the determination of the members "to reject all the amplifications, digressions and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness,

when men deliver'd so many things, almost, in an equal number of words. They have extracted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking ; positive expressions, clear senses ; a native easiness, bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can."

The poetic use of language implies a rejection of this ideal of 'Mathematical plainness'. The poet needs language, nor merely for the unambiguous recording of ideas and thoughts which his mind has already bodied forth into definite forms (—in some kinds of poetry he does need language just for this purpose, and then he gives us the kind of poetry which is covered by Pope's "What oft was thought but ne'er so well express'd—), but for the more creative purpose of shaping into significant definition the myriad impressions with which his mind is teeming. When the scientist sits down to write out his findings and conclusions, the intellectual activity of establishing principles and arriving at conclusions has come to an end. But when a poet begins to compose a poem, to fix the words and form the lines, the most intense and formative kind of mental activity is in progress—an activity comparable in its delicacy and its engrossing, compelling quality to that which issues in the most brilliant hypotheses and illuminating theories of the scientist. What he wants to say becomes legible even to himself when he has said it : the process of finding the words is simultaneously a process of the crystallization of inchoate mind-stuff into a poem. As D. W. Harding put it while describing Isaac Rosenberg's characteristically poetic use of language, "He—like many poets in some degree, one supposes—brought language to bear on the incipient thought at an earlier

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stage of its development. Instead of the emerging idea being racked slightly so as to fit a more familiar approximation of itself, and words found for *that*, Rosenberg let it manipulate words almost from the beginning, often without the controls of logic and intelligibility."

The complex procedure of the poetic or literary use of language illustrated in Chapter 7 is now recognised to be strictly necessary in the light of the poet's purpose : it is not a matter of wilful obscurity or decorative imagery, it is a matter of thinking out his 'thought' with the requisite subtlety and involution. Thus, Shakespeare's 'thought' in *Macbeth* comprehends intellectual concepts, moral judgments, emotional attitudes, evaluation of human conduct and human motive : it cannot work itself out in the radically simple, one-dimensional language of the scientist ; it needs for its precipitation the complexities and obliquities of the Shakespearean use of language analysed in a masterly passage of line-by-line criticism by F. R. Leavis.

The recognition of the importance of the scientific approach to reality does not imply the rejection of the literary or poetic approach. The establishment of the helio-centric theory does not invalidate the essential truth of Milton's *Paradise Lost* : science and poetry are both valid in their different universes of discourse,—the one inquiring into the nature of things, the other transforming and transvaluing them in the alembic of human nature and human wisdom.

## CHAPTER X

### LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

The Romantic tradition of thought tends to regard literature as a miracle breathed into life by the unique inspiration of the poet who dwells apart from society. It is the poet's gratuitous gift to society which has no part or lot in its creation. Such a conception of literature—as a mystic rose too rare and rich to be considered as stemming off from gross and earthy society—is untenable in the context of modern thought which is predominantly society-minded and which traces the impress of social forces upon all the products of human activity. Increasingly it is apparent that the man of genius is very much a man of his age and a member of a social group, intellectually and emotionally equipped by society to proceed along established ways of life and thought. Even his rejection of an established social order is conditioned by his essential conformity with that order, his independence is underpinned by his dependence. The Atlas of society indulgently shoulders the mighty revolutionary—a Blake or a Rousseau, a Marx or a Shaw.

The point implicit in the phrase '*literature of a language*' becomes explicit in the phrase '*literature of a people.*' Literature materialises only because the writer finds ready to his hand the instrument of language which a society has forged for his use.

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Even the most revolutionary writer is nursed upon a traditional language which directs and controls his mental life at the conscious and the sub-conscious levels. When Rousseau burst out with "Man is born free ; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they..." , he drew the language of his thought from the intellectual traditions of the 17th and 18th century European society. The high abstractionism of speculation in the age of reason, the gradual development of a *theology* of freedom, the adolescent stage of social conscience illustrated in the passage reveal the extent to which the most original of thinkers and writers derives inevitably from the society to which he belongs. Language is a social product, an index to the genius and culture of a people. The stage of its development and the range of its expressive capacity correspond to the level and complexity of the culture attained by the society which makes and uses the language. Thus, the English language at the beginning of the 18th century possessed qualities of neatness, propriety, logical order and rational clarity which were highly prized by a society bounded by 'the circumference of wit 'and controlled by the canons of good sense, taste and good manners—a society superficial but solid, rational and yet sentimental. A writer of the eminence of Pope, who was aware of the different qualities manifested by the language in the first half of the 17th century when Shakespeare in his maturity, Donne and the Metaphysical poets used it to subtler issues, nevertheless learnt to think and express himself in the cultivated language of his own day. Even the subtlety and complexity of the passages in which he transcends the 18th

century poetic modes—'What oft was thought but ne'er so well express'd'—is inseparable from a decorum, a propriety, and a sense of form which are totally absent from the poetry of the early 17th century. Set the well-known concluding passage from *The Dunciad*—

"More had she spoke, but yawn'd—All Nature nods :

What mortal can resist the Yawn of Gods ?  
Churches and chapels instantly it reach'd !  
(St. James's first, for leaden Gilbert preach'd) . . .  
Lost was the Nation's Sense, nor could be found,

While the long solemn Unison went round. . ."—  
against a characteristic passage from Donne's *The Will* :

"My constancy I to the planets give ;  
My truth to them, who at the Court do live ;  
My ingenuity and openness,  
To Jesuits ; to buffoons my pensiveness ;  
My silence to'any, and abroad hath been  
My money to a Capuchin . . .",

and it is obvious that the great differences in the linguistic modes of the two passages only reflect the differences in the social modes and *mores* on which the two poets have moulded themselves. Both are aiming satirically at lapses and absurdities which each has noted in the society to which he belongs. Pope castigates the snoring inactivity of the men of religion in his day, Donne exposes the obliquities of courtiers and the fibbing garrulities of travellers. But while Pope keeps up appearances with the help of a mock-serious dignity of style—

"What mortal can resist the Yawn of Gods . . ."  
'While the long solemn Unison went round. . .',



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a rhetorically formalised and epigrammatically patterned structure—

‘More had she spoke, but yawn’d—All Nature  
nods ...’

‘Lost was the Nation’s Sense, nor could be  
found ...’—

Donne has the informality, hard-hitting directness and effortless volubility of a way of life which sets up no barrier of decorum between private and public, which at once enables a man to wear his bleeding heart in public and bring his political experience and philosophic profundity to bear upon his private loves and hates. The almost unconscious aplomb of ‘My constancy I to the planets give’ would have jarred upon the 18th century sensibility as an astounding impropriety; the good-humoured informality of ‘My silence to’any, who abroad hath been’ would have struck an 18th century reader as a crude and illiterate formlessness. The differences in the linguistic modes of Pope and Donne are to a great extent explicable in terms of the differences in the social contexts to which they belonged.

But literature is not merely a use of language, although it is inseparable from language. It uses language for the expression of thoughts and feelings which are rooted in a particular society at a particular stage in its history. While it is true that poems and novels are written not by influences and environments but by individual poets and novelists, it is equally and more significantly true that the individual writers fully and effectively participate in the social life of their times. While one aspect of the greatness of a poet like Shakespeare is appropriately expressed in Ben Jonson’s well-known line,

‘He was not of an age, but for all time!’

the other aspect is touched upon in an earlier passage where Shakespeare is referred to as the 'Soul of the age'. In order to outlive his age a writer must be 'at the most conscious point of the race in his time'. He is sustained by the intellectual and spiritual climate of the society to which he belongs. The tendencies of human nature and the possibilities of human life and experience clothe themselves in his consciousness in the colours of the contemporary habits of life and thought, modes of speculation and action. He grasps the timeless through a temporal medium, attains universal knowledge through concrete moments of experience.

"Time past and time future

Allow but a little consciousness.

To be conscious is not to be in time

But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,

The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,  
The moment in the draughty church at smoke-fall

Be remembered, involved with past and future.

Only through time time is conquered."

All the fragrance and colour, the awakening actuality of Shakespeare's poetry derives from the Elizabethan age of which he was the soul. In his *Elizabethan World Picture* Dr. Tillyard has instanced many passages which take their significance from the Elizabethan *weltanschauung* which Shakespeare shared with his contemporaries. Thus, the currently held mediaeval conception of an all-inclusive world-order in which man has his allotted place controls the crucial passage on degree in *Troilus and Cressida* :

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“O, when degree is shak’d,  
Which is the ladder to all high designs,  
The enterprise is sick ! How could communities,  
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,  
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores, . . .  
But by degree, stand in authentic place ?  
Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And, hark, what discord follows !”

Even when, as in the problem plays and the tragedies, Shakespeare was bitterly and explosively critical of the established social norms of thought and conduct he shows a firm grasp on the actual, a penetrating insight into the contemporary. Lucio’s defence of lechery—“ . . .the vice is of a great kindred ; it is well allied : but it is impossible to extirp it quite, friar, till eating and drinking be put down. They say this Angelo was not made by man and woman after the downright way of creation”—and Lear’s arraignment of the false justicer—“Look with thine ears : see how yond justice rails upon yond thief. Hark, in thine ear : change places : and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief ?”—must be related to the full-blooded sexuality and Macchiavellian amorality of Elizabethan England with its tavern-fights of Marlowe and Greene and the astounding corruption of ‘the justest judge that was in England these hundred years’—Lord Bacon.

It seems necessary to consider specifically the case of a writer who turns his back upon the age and seeks to create an aesthetic world of his own, as also the case of a writer who runs full tilt against his age—the aesthete and the revolutionary. The various aesthetic theories and movements of the second half of the 19th century—Pre-Raphaelitism, Art for

Art's sake, Symbolism, fin de siècle æstheticism—projected the imaginary figure of the pure artist who has dedicated himself to the cult of beauty or the religion of art and who has neither eyes nor ears for the meaningless hubbub of social life which rises all around him. He is supremely indifferent to society and everyday reality: "As for living, our servants will do that for us." He does not even pay it the compliment of condemning or criticising it: he just ignores it. He thus owes nothing to society, has his own values and ideals, creates by the shaping power of his imagination a dream-world which in no way reflects or depends upon the actual world 'where men sit and hear each other groan.' The early Yeats, with his contempt for realistic or representational art, his rejection of the realistic drama of Ibsen, his deliberate putting out of the light of the scientific theories of Huxley and Tyndall, his planning of a mystical Order "which should buy or hire the castle, and keep it as a place where its members could retire for a while from the world, and where we might establish mysteries like those of Eleusis and Samothrace," may be taken to be a representative of the literary aesthete. The point brought out by his poetic career, however, is that he could not insulate himself for long from the society to which he belonged. The aspects of the contemporary situation flooded his consciousness almost in spite of himself and posed themselves in front of him for literary portrayal. He was increasingly dissatisfied with the vacuity and sentimentality of the poems composed by him during his aesthetic period:

"The holy centaurs of the hills are vanished;  
I have nothing but the embittered sun  
Banished heroic mother moon and vanished,

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And now that I have come to fifty years  
I must edure the timid sun."

He turned his face resolutely towards the contemporary and the actual and found a tonic quality in its ugly realities :

" . . .there is no deformity

But saves us from a dream."

No great artist in the literary history of the world has attained maturity without such a clear-eyed, resolute scrutiny of the values, the hopes and the fears of the society which threw him up. Dante and Shakespeare, Keats and Coleridge were fully alive to the human situation as it existed in their time and place, while the great mystics like Thomas á Kempis and the poet-saints of India arose in societies which cherished a living tradition of mysticism and recognised a special merit in those who transcended social realities and mundane interests.

If the dreamer awakes with a bad taste in his mouth and a sense of the fatuity of his private dreams, the revolutionary makes the social realities of his own day the very burden of his song. His revolutionary ardour is fed on the one hand by his dream of an earthly paradise embodying the supreme values of human life as he conceives them, on the other hand by his disgust at the stench and filth of the actual contemporary world. A firm hold on the latter is really a condition of the artistic effectiveness of his destructive and constructive criticism in a creative medium. A revolutionary masterpiece like Maxim Gorky's *Mother* or a piece of social criticism like Ibsen's *Doll's House* stands foursquare upon an intimate knowledge of the social situation. Conversely, it was the weakness and insecurity of

Shelley's grasp of social realities which gave point and weight to Arnold's criticism—"a weak and ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain." Prometheus' perception of the sorrows of man—

"Names are there, Nature's sacred watchwords,  
they

Were born aloft in bright emblazonry ;  
The nations thronged around, and cried aloud,  
As with one voice, Truth, liberty, and love !  
Suddenly fierce confusion fell from heaven  
Among them ; there was strife, deceit, and fear :  
Tyrants rushed in, and did divide the spoil.

This was the shadow of the truth I saw"—  
is more shadowy than truthful, and, correspond-  
ingly, Demogorgon's exordium at the end—

"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite ;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night ;  
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent ;  
To love and bear ; to hope till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates . . .

This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory"  
is more sentimental than heroic.

The most significant literature of the world has come from artists who have thoroughly soaked themselves in the life of their times, not from those who sit back in their private dream-worlds and ostentatiously refuse to put out a finger for fear of spoiling it with the sweat and blood of life . The context of a particular social organization, a specific way of life and thought, a given pattern of culture is indispensable to a writer who wants to compose literature in his own day. T. S. Eliot's remarks on the hollow cosmopolitanism of Irving Babbitt's philosophy apply to the shallow



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universality of a good deal of 'literary' work : " It is not that Mr. Babbitt has *misunderstood* any of these persons " (Confucius, Buddha, Socrates and Erasmus, from whom he derives his humanistic philosophy), " or that he is not fully acquainted with the civilization out of which they sprang. On the contrary, he knows all about them. It is rather, I think, that in his interest in the messages of individuals—messages conveyed in books—he has tended merely to neglect the conditions. The great men whom he upholds for our admiration and example are torn from their contexts of race, place and time. And in consequence, Mr. Babbitt seems to me to tear himself from his own context." Such a cultural rootlessness is one of the sources of weakness in contemporary art and literature in east and west. Modern cosmopolitanism is only a new phase of escapism, too barren a soil to bear artistic fruit.

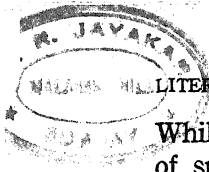
## CHAPTER XI

### LITERATURE, THOUGHT AND FEELING

One of the usual ways of distinguishing between science and literature is to say that science is intellectual and literature emotional, that the one appeals to the head, the other to the heart. Poetry is the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'; it is expected to have an emotive, moving effect on the reader. It is predominantly musical because music is a potent evocative to human feelings. The poet is correspondingly conceived to be a soft-hearted, intensely sensitive person who serves as a medium for the communication of heart-stirring emotional charges. Swimming on the tides of emotion he is careful to avoid the rocks of thought: like Yeats of the Celtic Revival phase, he would 'write of nothing but emotion'.

The emotional theory of poetry was, paradoxically enough, a product of the 'age of prose and reason'. The 18th century partiality for clear-cut distinctions and neat pigeon-holing was partly responsible for the sentimental view that literature was primarily based on feeling and emotion. The cult of impulse and inspiration which spread in England and Germany during the Pre-Romantic and the Romantic periods sanctified the figure of the impassioned poet pouring out his heart

"In profuse strains of unpremeditated art".



While the Victorians modified the Romantic doctrine of spontaneity and insisted upon technical elaboration and deliberate artistry, they implicitly accepted the theory of the emotional content of poetry. Tennyson, the Pre-Raphaelites, Pater and the aesthetes of the 'Romantic 90's' derive quite naturally from the Romantic line. Associated with this attitude is the tendency to discount the more thoughtful and thought-provoking kinds of writing as unpoetical or inartistic: to regard the problem plays of Shakespeare as ugly and vulgar, to condemn the poetry of Donne and the Metaphysical poets as clever logic-chopping and to assert with Arnold that "Dryden and Pope are not the classics of our poetry, they are the classics of our prose".

Now it must be admitted fully that the expression and evocation of emotion is one of the primary aims of poetry and that it is the exclusive aim of some kinds of poetry. There is the simple lyric which is suffused with emotion—the joys and sorrows, the loves and hates of men. It does not subject experience to a reflective weighing or critical pondering: it registers and evokes an emotional response to experience, to life. Thus, the following lines of Shelley express a simple longing, a panting thirst for music, and induce in the reader a response in which the intellect has no part.:

"I pant for music which is divine,  
My heart in its thirst is a dying flower;  
Pour forth the sound like enchanted wine,  
Loosen the notes in a silver shower;  
Like a herbless plain, for the gentle rain,  
I gasp, I faint, till they wake again."

The Elizabethan lyricists, Burns, Shelley and the younger poets of the Romantic Revival, Tennyson,

The reader can abandon himself to the luxury of feeling generated by the mellifluous and melodious music of the words and rhythms which charm to sleep the 'meddling intellect'. But the danger of an addiction to such poetry is that it tends to make us soft and sentimental, unwilling to think about life, to sift and question our experience with critical responsibility, to attain truth by throwing open all the windows of our consciousness. It reduces literature to a mere pastime, a distraction from the serious, responsible activities of life. It thus runs counter to the main argument of this book, that literature stimulates 'the whole soul of man into activity,' that it embodies the total response of the human personality to life—a response, of course, on the contemplative plane—in an effort to see life steadily and see it whole.

A pregnant interpenetration of thought and feeling characterises the work of the great literary artists of the world. The poet is not engaged in a self-indulgent pandering to an emotional gust : he is absorbed in an intense effort to know, to understand, to evaluate ; he is not a voluptuary, but a seeker after the light of knowledge ( जिज्ञासु ). He is a seer who sees simultaneously with the eyes, the heart and the mind : he knows how to graft feelings on sense-impressions and ideas on feelings, to keep close to the concrete of experience and yet transcend it on the wings of the spirit. Sensuous perception, emotional response, intellectual conception, spiritual vision moral valuation—they are all fused in the

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alembic of the poet's mind and form themselves into a poem. The emotion vitalises and intensifies the thought, the thought informs and controls the emotion. The thought, moreover, is not usually of the logical, discursive, ratiocinative kind ; the strict correlation of premises to conclusions, of argument to statement, of evidence to assertion is too slow and pedestrian for the pace and the charged complexity of poetic thinking. A poetic theme develops by hint and ellipsis, rapid transition and bold juxtaposition, by symbol and conceit. Much is taken for granted, diverse universes of discourse are linked together, clues of imagery are dropped and picked up at need, a single word is an 'open sesame' to a wealth of associations.

Thus, the intellectual self-possession which enables Donne in his *Hymn to God my God, in my sickness* to work out a conceit with precision and poetic effectiveness does not put a damper on the glow of spiritual emotion :

" Whiltst my Physicians by their love are grown  
Cosmographers, and I their Map, who lie  
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown  
That this is my South-west discovery  
*Per fretum febris*, by these straits to die,  
I joy, that in these straits, I see my West ;  
For, though their currents yield return to none,  
What shall my West hurt me ? As West and  
East

In all flats Maps ( and I am one ) are one,  
So death does touch the Resurrection."

The sincerity of the poet's faith in the Christian conception of death as the final stage in the pilgrimage to resurrection is apparent in the joy which lightens these lines, the optimism which suggests

the topical analogy of sea-discovery and the south-west passage. The emotion that rejoices in death stimulates the intellect to activity : the pilgrimage of the soul becomes an Elizabethan sea-voyage, the sick body lying flat on the bed is the map which his friends the physicians are consulting to locate the much sought-after south-west passage by the straits—of Magellan, or Gibralter, or some other—which he has discovered. The unexpected play on the word straits —the *straits* of fever in the Latin phrase —reinforces the impression of self-possession. The second stanza takes up the image of the sea-voyage and the conceit of the map into the lofty context of religious meditation and faith. The currents of the Straits do not allow the voyager to return—death is final and irreversible—it is

“The undiscovered country from whose bourne  
No traveller returns”—

and yet paradoxically, as in the flat map east and west touch and unite, the extremes met, so by the miracle of Christ death leads on to Resurrection. The tug of a deep under-current of feeling is felt by the reader as he follows the developing thought of the poem : thought and feeling reinforce each other in supporting the theme of the poem. The poet is responding to the situation with all his faculties alive and active, with an intergrated sensibility. This is the secret of the strength of Metaphysical poetry which achieves a union of the head and the heart, of intense passion and subtle thought. The Metaphysicals refused to shut out of poetry any part of their experience, to collapse any of their organs of consciousness for the preservation of poetic beauty or poetic purity. Poetry as they conceived it and as the greatest poets

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have always conceived it touched life at many points and grasped it at different levels.

An illustration of strong emotion stimulating the mind into activity, finding its appropriate thought, can be found in the last but one section of Henry King's *The Exequy* lamenting his 'dead saint':

"'Tis true, with shame and grief I yield,  
Thou like the *Vann* first took'st the field,  
And gotten has the victory  
In thus adventuring to dy  
Before me, whose more years might crave  
A just precedence in the grave.  
But hark ! My Pulse, like a soft Drum,  
Beats my approach, tells *Thee* I come ;  
And slow howere my marches be,  
I shall at last sit down by *Thee*."

The emotion pulsating in this passage is dominant and heart-searching, but it does not cloud or bedim the intellect. Both the mind and the heart are operating at full pressure and give to the poem a characteristic richness of thought. The infinite regret at the death of the beloved is embittered by a feeling of chagrin and humiliation that she, the younger of the two, has found the courage 'to dy Before me.' In the second movement of the section, grief is softened by the serene confidence founded on religious faith that he will be reunited to her after death. The emotional tossing and pitching is controlled by the ballast of thought provided by the military conceit. The beloved threw herself into the vanguard and got the victory and reward of the battle of life, viz., death and eternity. A nobly moving but subtly controlled expression of his sense of chagrin, of being put out of countenance, is achieved in those thoughtful lines,

"In thus adventuring to dy  
Before me, whose more years might crave  
A just precedence in the grave."

The low, depressed condition of the survivor is most suggestively taken up into the military conceit : his beating pulse becomes a 'soft Drum' which

'Beats my approach, tells *Thee* I come'.

The slow ebbing away of his life is a slow and steady march to the trysting-place where

'I shall at last sit down by *Thee*'.

Thus it is that the wakeful mind and the feeling heart co-operate in giving to great poetry at once a depth and a height, intensity and lucidity.

It must of course be remembered that a poet's capacity for thought and feeling is inseparable from his mastery of the linguistic medium. While the scientist takes in the world with the help of laboratory technique the literary artist follows reality on linguistic-metrical feet. In the well-chosen words of F. R. Leavis : "Poetry matters because of the kind of poet who is more alive than other people, more alive in his own age. He is, as it were, the most conscious point of the race in his time ... his capacity for experiencing and his power of communicating are indistinguishable ; not merely because we should not know of the one without the other, but because his power of making words express what he feels is indistinguishable from his awareness of what he feels." His control of language helps him get a hold on experience : he excludes neither thought nor emotion, he has a controlling hand on both by means of the reins of language.





The idea of literature needs for its completion a realisation that writer and reader must co-operate in its making. What the writer writes on the page is a mute score : it is vocalised into meaning in the reader's mind. Literature implies the play of mind upon mind through the medium of the written word. It exists as a social activity in a social context, created by men for men. While the controversies centring in 'communication' and 'self-expression' can be tackled in the appropriate place, it should be a point of common agreement that literature implies both writers and readers. A writer always expects his writings to be read : Milton relied upon the response of 'a fit audience, though few', and Bhavabhuti depended on distant times and climes to provide him with a discriminating reader (कालोद्भयं निरवधिर्विपुलं च पृथ्वी ) The indifference of poets to readers is often a mask to conceal and protect their apprehensive sensitivity.

Writing and reading are complementary and correlative activities : either is otiose without the other, neither by itself can bring literature into being. No writer starts from scratch ; he is a critical and appreciative reader of the writings of predecessors and contemporaries, he knows that literature is eminently readable, that it takes effect only as it is read. That is why Ben Jonson includes

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'exactness of study and multiplicity of reading' among the qualifications of a poet. By intense reading the writer learns to discriminate between what reads well and what reads poorly, to realise that the test of the pudding lies in the eating. By the time he takes his place among writers he need not distinctly remind himself that what he writes must read well : his very mind has been formed by his reading, his choice of words and use of language is controlled by the fastidious taste he has acquired during his reading. He is an exacting reader of his own writing and is continuously measuring his own performance against the masterpieces which he has read and studied so meticulously. It is in this sense that T. S. Eliot's remark about the better poet being the more critical should be taken : 'The poetic critic is criticizing poetry in order to create poetry.'

A poem composed of words is organized in a particular way. When the poet uses the words he kinetizes a specific part of the powers of suggestion and expression which they contain : he rides their ambiguities like the swimmer riding the waves. But once the poem has come into existence, it is independent of the poet. It is there for readers to tackle and interpret, read and enjoy in the light of their experience and according to the bent of their minds. It is one and yet it can mean different things to different men. Every reader will inevitably relate it to the circumstances of his own life and give to the words of the poem a value unintended by the poet. The experience of love expressed by Campion in the following stanzas will be coloured and shaped by the personality and experiences of the particular reader :

"Follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow !  
Though thou be black as night,  
And she made all of light,  
Yet follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow !

Follow her whose light thy light depriveth ;  
Though here thou livest disgraced,  
And she in heaven is placed,  
Yet follow her whose light the world reviveth !"

Rejecting the theoretical extravagance of I. A. Richards' 'multiple meaning' hypothesis, we can still accept the point it brings out. Ambiguity is central to the nature and function of literature ; it is wrong-headed to demand mathematical exactness from the literary artist. He has created something which thereafter passes out of his control. He has tossed the ball to the reader who is free to do what he likes with it. Of course, he would like the reader to catch his meaning, to read the poem 'with the same spirit that its author wrote'. But he knows if he is wise that the reader has in front of him only the words on the page, not the hidden intentions and impulses in the mind of the poet, that the reader can only wet-nurse them into meaning from the breast of his own experience of life and literature. In fact a stage will come when he himself will take his place among the readers of his own poetry and realise that the experience induced by a reading of the poem may diverge from the experience which stimulated the making of the poem. Of course, the more organically the words of the poem sprout like shoots out of the original experience, the less widely will the reader's experience diverge from the writer's . But the divergency will not disappear entirely : what the reader makes

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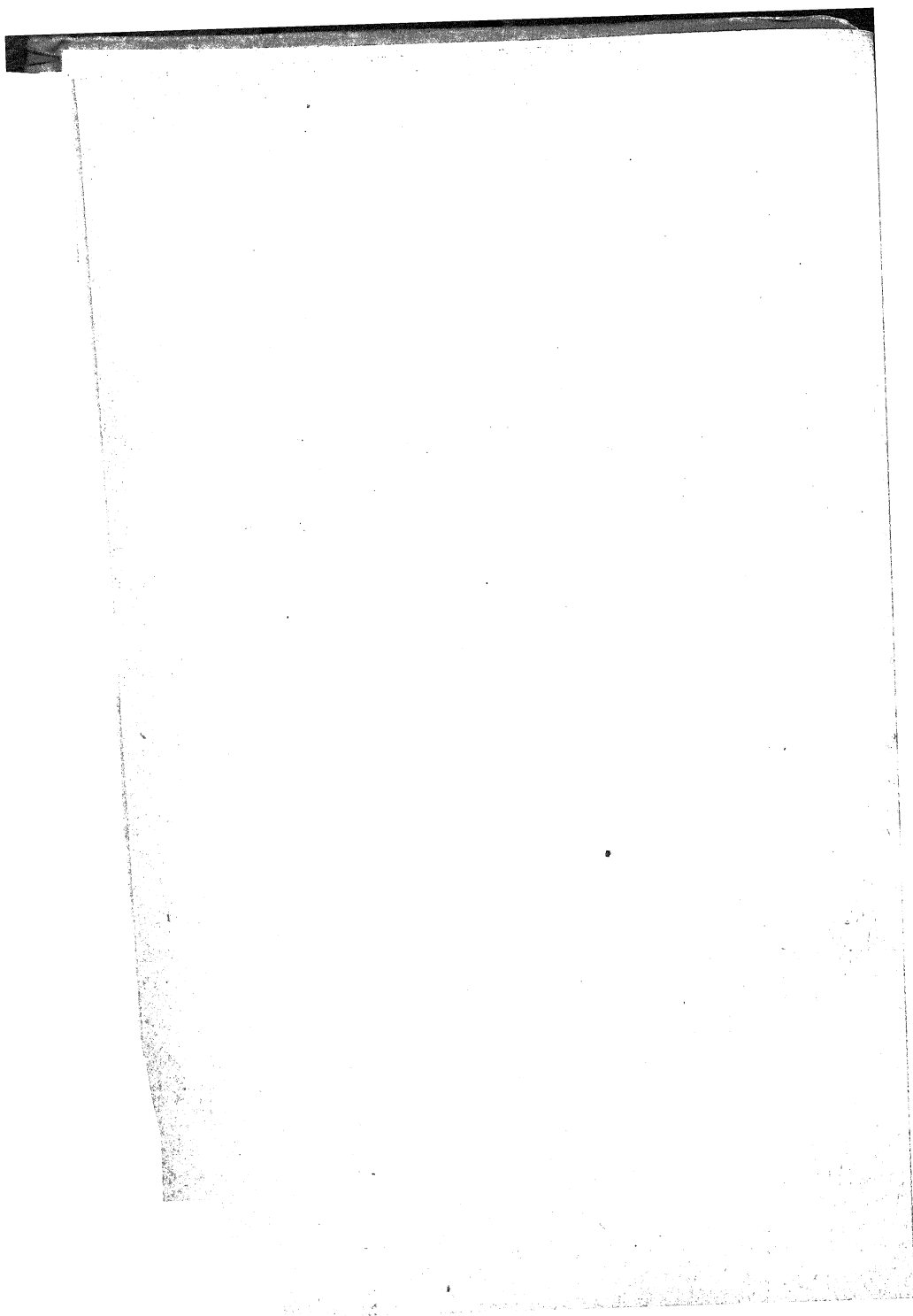
of the poem is bound to differ ever so slightly from what the poet meant by it. Here as in other spheres of consciousness Coleridge lays down the true doctrine :

“O lady ! we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does nature live”.

Different readers may respond differently to the same poem without either invalidating the poet's original experience or dissipating the integrity of the poem. The balance and reconciliation of these variant responses is a co-operative critical process which clarifies both what the poem is and what it means. Reading no less than writing is a creative activity and requires for its success not only the co-operation between writer and reader but also the collaboration of reader with reader. The reality of this collaboration enabled Dr. Johnson and the men of letters of the 18th century to invoke so confidently the testimony of the ‘common reader’ in deciding upon the literary merit of a poem or a play.

The promotion of this collaboration is one of the main functions of literary criticism. The critic is primarily a trained and experienced reader who takes the words as the writer put them together and elicits from them the kernel of their significance. He follows the lead of different key-concepts and explores alternative ways of interpreting the poem. He tries to play the conscious meanings of the words against the probable—and probably sub-conscious—impulses in the mind of the poet, to measure the actual experiences which a reading of the poem induces in him and other readers against the possible experience of the poet which shaped itself into the poem. He thus renews and preserves the life of the poem which would, as a mere series of words, other-

wise exist only as the husk and dry bones of the poet's creation. To the words of the poet can be applied the remark of Shakespeare's Theseus about the actors : "The best in this kind are but shadows ; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them." If the poet's imagination shapes airy nothing into a word structure, the reader's imagination fans the fading coals of words into a live poem. As T. S. Eliot says : "The poem's existence is somewhere between the writer and the reader ; it has a reality which is not simply the reality of what the writer is trying to 'express', or of his experience of writing it, or of the experience of the reader or of the writer as reader."



## CHAPTER XIII

### FUNCTIONS OF LITERATURE : DELIGHT

Our consideration of the various problems connected with the *nature of literature* included incidental references to the different conceptions of the *functions* of literature. In fact the elucidation of the *nature* of literature is bound to be incomplete without a clear idea of its *functions*. Nature is organically related to function : the two lines of inquiry meet and intersect at several points. Many conflicting views have been expressed about the functions of literature and some of them have become the creeds of various schools and groups of artists and critics. It is necessary to consider some of these views and arrive at conclusions which will clarify and define our idea of literature.

One of the oldest of them is the conviction that literature exists in order to give pleasure or delight. This view has been expressed down the ages with various degrees of refinement. In the Homeric times the minstrel is welcome at the board of the lord because by his songs and tales he 'completes the satisfaction of a good feast'. In the far more sophisticated world of Omar Khayyam poetry ranks with wine and women among the good things of life. Under radically different conditions, the megalopolitan reader of the modern best-seller holds the same view of the function of literature with a differ-



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ence : to him literature is more a pastime than an entertainment, an antidote for boredom rather than an element in the *joie de vivre*. It is clear that the common man will not bother to read or listen to literature 'if the prospect of delight is wanting'. It is almost entirely a voluntary activity with him, one of the many alternative ways in which he can spend his not-too-many leisure moments, and if it doesn't afford him genuine pleasure he will please himself in other ways. At this level the pleasure derived from reading literature is a simple affair, on a par with the pleasure derived from a sumptuous feast or foot-ball match : immediate, unreflecting, momentary. It may be remembered, however, that even at this level pleasure is experienced from a tragic tale like *Sir Patrick Spens* or a pathetic one like *Clerk Saunders*, that even the groundlings spontaneously enjoyed the plays of Shakespeare or Webster.

That poetry pleases may be taken as a fact of experience : the nature of that pleasure and the question whether pleasure can be regarded as the *raison d'être* of poetry require to be analysed and discussed. In speaking of the pleasure of literature it is necessary to distinguish between the joy of life that may move the writer to write, the joy he may be conceived to experience during the act of composition, and the joy which the reader feels in reading a poem and contemplating on what he has read. In some sense a writer may be regarded as finding life enjoyable and taking pleasure in the act of composition : a more precise formulation will be attempted at a later stage. It is with the pleasure derived from literature by the reader that we are immediately concerned. In simple cases, it is almost a matter of

gratifying the senses : as the actual landscape pleases the eye the poet's picture delights the mind's eye, the poet's music the mind's ear. Thus, Keats's autumn :

“ ...Thou hast thy music too,—  
While barréd clouds bloom the soft-dying day  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue ;  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river shallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies ;  
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly  
bourn ;

Hedge-cricket sing ; and now with treble soft  
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft ;  
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.”

A very large part of the pleasure given by such a passage is due to the beautiful images and musical notes and phrases which it contains. Poetry undoubtedly can exist without such sensuous elements—there is a poetry of thought and a music of ideas :

“Home is where one starts from. As we grow  
older

The world becomes stranger, the pattern more  
complicated

Of dead and living. Not the intense moment  
Isolated, with no before and after,

But a lifetime burning in every moment  
And not the lifetime of one man only

But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.

Usually, however, an appeal to the sensuous memory is one of the effective methods by which poetry operates. That is why poetry is referred to in the classical tradition as a ‘speaking picture’ and the poet is characterised as one endowed with keen senses as well as with a delicate sensibility. Plato

condemned poetry because, among other things, it enticed men from the pursuit of the good life to the pleasures of the senses.

It is of course obvious that the sensuous pleasures of literature are less *material*, more refined than those derived from the sights and sounds of the actual world. They take effect almost entirely through the medium of the mind—memory, imagination, intellect—and arise in the process of one human mind responding to the verbal pattern composed by another mind. The reader who is enjoying Keats' *Autumn* has an experience essentially different from that of the countryman wandering about the fields in autumn..

In more complicated cases we have to deal with something deeper and subtler than sensuous delight. Let us take one of the most intense passages in *Antony and Cleopatra*—that in which Royal Egypt becomes a mere woman crushed by the death of the 'noblest of men':

"No more, but e'en a woman and commanded  
By such poor passion as the maid that milks  
And does the meanest chares. —It were for me  
To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods ;  
To tell them that this world did equal theirs  
Till they had stol'n our jewel. All's but naught ;  
Patience is sottish, and impatience does  
Become a dog that's mad : then is it sin  
To rush into the secret house of death  
Ere death dare come to us ?"

Obviously, the key-note of the passage is emotional : bitter and over-mastering grief, desperation and utter helplessness, impatience and a longing for death appear and disappear in a seething mass of passions. The reader of such a passage is un-

deriving pleasure or delight from the lines in the play. It is partly a matter of appreciating the deftness with which the pattern of emotions in the heart of the bereaved woman is traced ; partly a matter of following with wonder and excitement a new dimension of 'Royal Egypt's' complex personality ; and partly an enjoyment of the masterly use of language to express the emotions and explore the personality. What Aristotle refers to as 'the pleasure felt in things imitated', the joy of 'seeing a likeness' is less relevant to such a passage than his earlier remark, "Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity ... The cause of this again is, that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general." The exploration of the human mind in the stress of circumstance, the realisation of the possibilities of human nature—it is in some such terms that 'the full surprise and elevation of a new experience of poetry' of this order can be described. It is a stretching of the mind and a lifting up of the heart rather than pleasure or delight. It is a fingering of the whole gamut of human experience—touching the very depths of despair and misanthropy at one end, as in this outburst of Timon :

"... bound servants, steal !

Large-handed robbers your grave masters are,  
And pill by law ! maid, to thy master's bed,—  
Thy mistress is o' the brothel ! son of sixteen,  
Pluck the lin'd crutch from thy old limping sire,

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With it beat out his brains ! piety and fear,  
Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,  
Domestic awe, night rest, and neighbourhood,  
Instruction, manners, mysteries and trades,  
Degrees, observances, customs, and laws,  
Decline to your confounding contraries,  
And let confusion live !"—

and the heights of happiness and spiritual joy at the other, as in these lines of Vaughan :

"O joy ! Infinite Sweetness ! with what flowers,  
And shoots of glory, my soul breaks, and buds !  
All the long hours  
Of Night, and Rest  
Through the still shrouds  
Of Sleep, and Clouds,  
This Dew fell on my Breast ;  
O how it Bloods  
And Spirits all my Earth !

The actual experiences of life are pleasurable and painful in various ways and different proportions. The most crucial of them are intensely, excruciatingly painful : the gaping void of bereavement, the torture of jealousy, the paralysing shock of sudden disillusionment. They often batter and bruise the person who has them. But the sufferer in life has no living counter-part in literature. *Macbeth* and *Lear* are figments of the imagination with but a shadowy existence in the mind of the reader. It is the by-stander, the eye-witness to a real tragedy, the sympathetic friend or observant spectator whose reactions are relevant to a consideration of the reader's response to *Macbeth* or *Lear*. The sympathetic friend will be genuinely moved to sorrow by the sufferer's anguish, will offer what consolation he can and render whatever help is practicable ; he

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may in his own thoughts dwell upon the moral or metaphysical aspects of the tragedy that has occurred and discuss them with others ; but he will not consider the experience pleasurable nor will he desire a repetition of it. In reminiscent moments he will recall the experience and, if he is given that way, ponder and meditate upon its significance. But even so, it will not occur to him that either the original or the recalled experience was pleasurable or desirable. He has been caught up in the web of life ; he plays a part that has fallen to him.

On the other hand, the reader finds a distinct pleasure in reading a work of literary art. He loves to follow the artistic exploitation of the medium of language by the master craftsman. The words come charged with significance and ordered into a pattern which it is a delight to take in. Even the darkest passages of a gloomy tragedy are lighted up by the verbal incandescence. The passage from the *Timon of Athens* quoted above reveals an astonishing mastery of verbal arrangement. The reader undoubtedly finds it a pleasurable exercise to set 'bound servants' over against 'grave masters' who are at the same time 'large-handed robbers ;' to link up 'steal' with 'pill by law' ; to trace the strange pattern of 'maid', 'master' and 'mistress', complicated by 'master's bed' and 'mistress . . . o' the brothel' and relate it to the overwhelming generalities at the end —

“Domestic awe, night rest, and neighbourhood,  
Degrees, observances, customs and laws,  
Decline to your *confounding* contraries,  
And let *confusion* reign !”

A book lives by a living use of language, and the reader loves to watch the writer's masterly word-

play. He returns to the book because every fresh reading reveals unsuspected correspondences and recurrent themes in the texture. Literature like the other fine arts is, in one aspect of it, a kind of play : —that is why, in the well-worn phrase of Sidney, it 'holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner'.

But as the dancer through the graceful medium of rhythmic movement communicates to the spectator a profoundly painful experience in a dance of death, the poet, never flagging in his artistic moulding and modelling of language, contrives to make the reader a participant in a significant and thought-provoking experience. The painfulness of the raw experience of real life is of a different order from the painfulness experienced by a reader of the *Duchess of Malfi* or the *Mayor of Casterbridge*. The latter belongs to the contemplative life, the former to the active. The latter kind of experience is voluntarily given and voluntarily sought : its painfulness is the painfulness attendant upon a stretching of the mind to embrace the poet's apocalyptic vision of life ( विश्वरूपदर्शन ). The reader who is responding appropriately experiences simultaneously a delight in tracing the verbal pattern, a pleasurable surprise at the way in which 'the most heterogeneous ideas' are 'compelled into unity by the operation of the poet's mind', an alternation of throbbing pain and rapturous exaltation produced by an artistically composed prospect of the terrors and splendours of human life. Take a typically depressing passage like this from *Burnt Norton* :

"Only a flicker

Over the strained time-ridden faces

Distracted from distraction by distraction

Filled with fancies and empty of meaning  
 Tumid apathy with no concentration  
 Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind  
 That blows before and after time,  
 Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs  
 Time before and time after."

The admittedly painful realisation of the vacuity, futility and drift of modern life is rendered supportable by an appreciation of the astonishing power of the poet's art in imparting to the reader so vivid an impression and, paradoxically enough, making futility significant. The concrete vividness of 'the strained time-ridden faces'—obviously in the crowd that 'flowed over London Bridge' in the 'Unreal City'—is played skilfully against the sickening and numbing abstraction of 'Distracted from distraction by distraction'. The drift of modern civilization is sharply imaged in

"Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind  
 That blows before and after time",

while its poisonous unhealthy effect is conveyed by identifying the 'cold wind' of external circumstance with the 'wind in and out of unwholesome lungs'—the diseased elements of human nature and social tradition. It serves little purpose to label the composite impression of such a passage as 'pleasurable' or 'painful'; it is both at once. The significant point is that, above all, the passage illumines 'whatever is dark', it reveals in a flash, as Longinus said, not only the author's power but his vision of certain aspects of human life. As the reader follows the poet's artfully contrived composition and feels its expressive power he has a sense of exhilaration: it is as though in responding to the poet's masterly expression of the unnerving reality he has conquered



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and transcended it.

The paradox of tragedy must be resolved in some such terms. That we find an inexhaustible significance in a tragedy like *Macbeth* or *Lear*, that we return repeatedly to the play with ever-increasing zest and interest, that we have a strange experience of rare value in following the spectacle of intolerable suffering, is sure to be universally acknowledged by lovers of literature. It is an unwarrantable degradation of the reader's experience to talk of sadistic pleasure or purgative catharsis. The experience of reading a tragedy is pre-eminently "something intellectual, something which grasps what it perceives through the senses ; something which takes a view of things ; which sees more than the senses convey ; which reasons upon what it sees, and while it sees ; which invests it with an idea." The literary text of a play like *Macbeth* makes incessant demands upon all the faculties of the reader's mind. As its theme develops organically into a work of art it facilitates the re-integration of the reader's sensibility. It quickens his consciousness of diverse and disparate aspects of life— कचिद्वीणावाद्यं कचिदपि च हाहेति रुदिम् । — ; it enables him to achieve a 'balance and reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities' in human experience. Tragedy is the meeting place of the diverse planes of human possibility—Duncan's angel-white grace and 'plenteous joys, Wanton in fulness' and Macbeth's desperate and confessedly bankrupt egoism—

"But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,

Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep

In the affliction of these terrible dreams

That shake us nightly : better be with the dead,

FUNCTIONS OF LITERATURE : DELIGHT

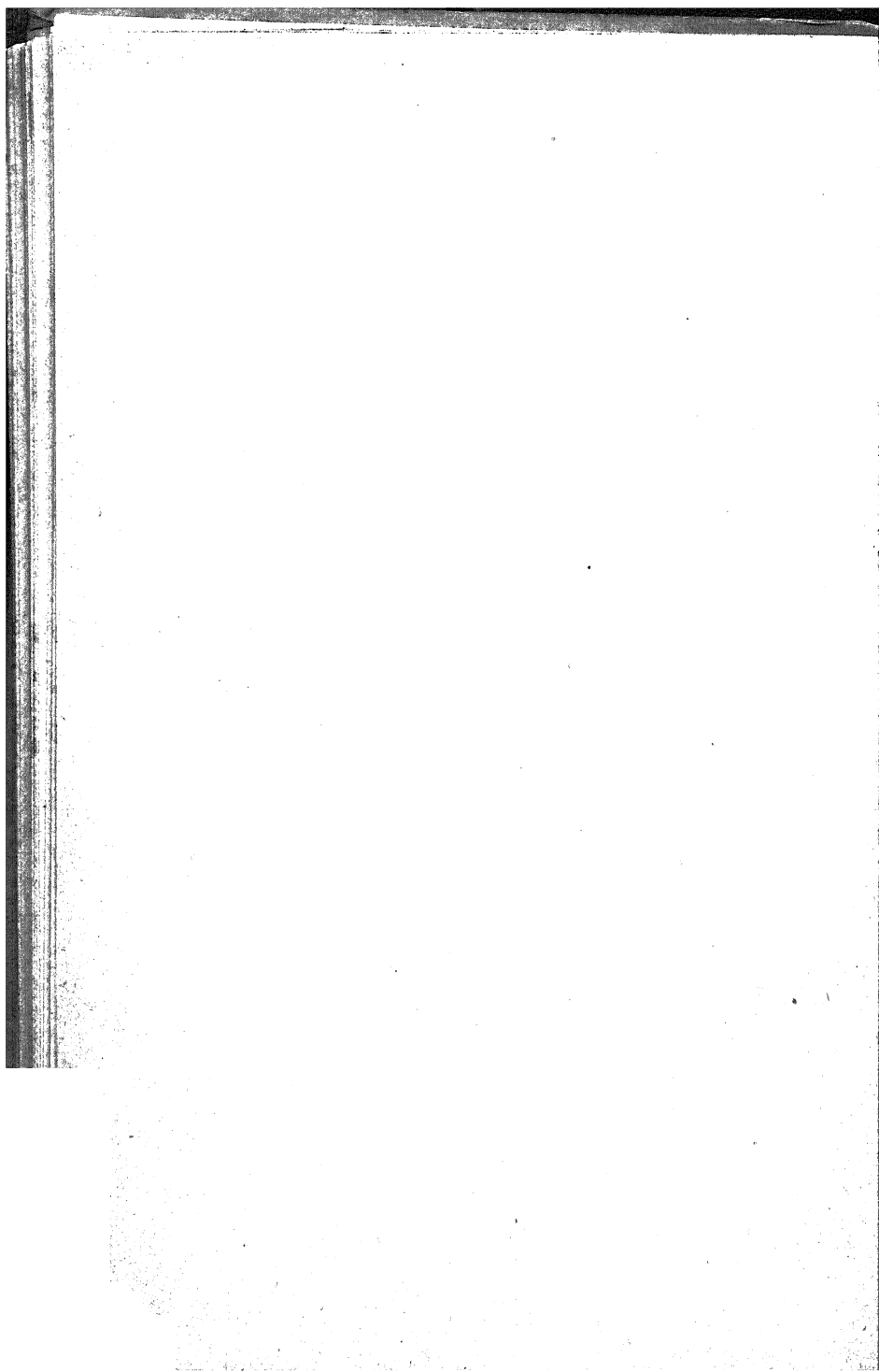
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,  
That on the torture of the mind to lie  
In restless ecstasy."

By converging these planes on to a critical point it gives a weird actuality to the manifold intricacies of human life. While it necessitates a clear-eyed and courageous facing of the worst it also creates an exhilarating awareness of the best : it knows the magic of filiating the polar opposites of good and evil —as the corruption of the best is the worst, the purification of the worst in the purgatory of death can be the best :—

"...nothing in his life

Became him like the leaving it."

The poise and maturity of outlook made possible by such an apocalypse is the gift of all great literature. Pain and delight undoubtedly accompany the process by which it takes hold on the reader but they cannot be regarded as its *raison d'être*.



## CHAPTER XIV

### INSTRUCTION

Almost as old as the view that delight is the end of literature is its usual complement that literature exists to teach. One discerns a kind of dialectical opposition between the two: the former regards literature as an end in itself, the latter as a means to an end; the former focusses attention on aesthetic qualities, the latter on utilitarian; the former considers literature as a socially approved form of entertainment provided by writer for reader, the latter considers it as a form of moral education demanding from the writer a sense of social responsibility. Out of the former line of thought have developed theories like 'art for art's sake' and 'expressionism'; out of the latter, theories like Ruskin's 'arts are didactic to the people' and Marx's 'literature is propaganda.'

Like the hedonistic theory of the function of literature, the didactic theory also has been held and formulated with various degrees of complexity. The Homeric idea of the minstrel as the seer of truth and the inspired oracle of events to come developed into a didactic view of the poet's social function—such, for instance, as is expressed by Euripides in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes: a poet can claim admiration "If his art is true, and his counsel sound; and if he brings help to the nation, By making men better in some respect." The responsibility for the

moral improvement of men was even more emphatically placed by Plato on the shoulders of poets : he advocated the institution of a rigorous censorship that would expunge from the works of poets ancient and modern everything likely to tamper with morality and religion. There is a subtler as well as a profounder conception of the poet's moral function in the well-known passage which occurs in Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* : "The great instrument of moral good is the imagination ; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause." Common to all the versions of the didactic theory is the conviction that literature is not a frivolous activity, a childish blowing of iridescent verbal bubbles, but that it is a serious and significant activity with important social consequences— 'that it must be understood and taken seriously, or not at all'. Of course it need hardly be said that taking it seriously does not mean striking up a solemn attitude in front of it, that the seriousness of literature does not exclude the gaiety of elegant trifling, the fun of joking and witticism, the laughter of comedy, the pungent bitterness of satire and irony.

While considering the different theories of the function of literature it is helpful to remember T. S. Eliots' suggestion that poetry has many different kinds, and, correspondingly, many different uses. The attempt to generalize from one kind of poetry to all kinds of poetry leads to a good deal of unreal discussion and verbal controversy. That genuine literature and even great literature can be written with an avowedly didactic purpose is clear from the work of such varied writers as Bunyan and Lucretius, the author of the 'Sermon on the Mount' and the author of the 'Divine Comedy'. The 'morality'

## INSTRUCTION

plays, the sermons of Andrews and Donne, Dr. Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes*, Pope's *Epistles* and Wordsworth's *The Prelude* are varied instances of didactic literature designed either to preach moral lessons or present ideas, systems of thought or the growth of the poet's mind with an eye to their morally and spiritually exalting effect. It is but natural that the great moral and spiritual issues of human life should engross the mind of the poet who is always a keen student of human nature and human life and that they should moralise his song. Of course, forthright and straightforward didacticism was easier and more congenial to societies which accepted the tradition of moral preaching than to societies which are expected to smile at such naiveté. A poem like "The character of a happy warrior" or Henry Vaughan's "The Retreat" places before the reader a moral ideal for his acceptance: an ideal, however, to which the poet gives a *real*, not merely a *nominal* assent, which he has absorbed into his whole being. Vaughan's longing for the days of his 'Angell-infancy',

"When on some *gilded Cloud*, or flower  
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,  
And in those weaker glories spy  
Some shadows of eternity;  
Before I taught my tongue to wound  
My Conscience with a sinful sound,  
Or had the black art to dispense  
A sev'ral sin to ev'ry sense,  
But felt through all this fleshly dress  
Bright *shoots* of everlastingness",

expresses itself in a perfectly natural and simple didacticism with a genuinely poetic effect. Vaughan responds with his whole being—body, mind and

soul—to the ideal of moral innocence and spiritual vision which is symbolized in Christ's "suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven", and he is obviously trying to stimulate a similar response in the reader by utilising the poetic medium. The vitality of his moral ideal is felt in the power it has of creating the imaginative experience which is the poem. It is of course true that in many instances excellent moral ideals fail to inspire poetry: so much of the 18th century and Victorian didacticism in verse is dead as poetry—large fragments of Thomson's *Seasons* and Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, many of Tennyson's English and Arthurian *Idylls* are cases in point. But it is not didacticism as an aim or moral ideals as themes that are at fault; it is not even that the poet was insincere in holding or preaching them; it is simply that in this and this particular instance his poetic art failed to master the material.

A good deal of poetry—some of it of the highest order—is not so directly preoccupied with the teaching of moral ideals. It is often absorbed in the great moral issues of life, it offers a profound analysis of them, and yet it is not didactic in the usual sense of the term. The plays of Shakespeare probe human nature and human life to a depth and with a thoroughness which give them a rich moral significance. Nobody, however, will ascribe to them a didactic purpose. They explore the infinite possibilities of experience and quicken at every point the perceptive and discriminative powers of the reader. They reveal the complexities which must be taken account of in any responsible effort to gauge the ultimate values of life. A play like *Antony and Cleopatra* develops a pattern of human

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life which brings out the interplay of mighty forces and suggests a point of rest, of balance, by resolving a tense and over-charged conflict. It takes up the norms of ideal and conduct embodied in the conventional morals and manners of society and places us as it were at the very centre of the vortex which dissipates them. Love, ambition loyalty, calculating wisdom, spiritual lethargy — they spin the vortex and spin the human beings into the vortex, shake and unsettle their rooted convictions. Antony's sense of having lost his caste in the moment of defeat—

“All's come to this!—The hearts  
That spaniel'd me at heels, to whom I gave  
Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets  
On blossoming Caesar ; and this pine is bark'd  
That overtopp'd them all”—

is to be taken against the background of a complex which includes his passion for the 'most triumphant lady' whose person 'beggar'd all description', his awareness of the public comment on his career—'He hath given his empire Upto a whore'—the infinite regret of his admirers and devoted servants at his disastrous indiscretion during the sea-fight :

“...She once being loof'd  
The noble ruin of her magic, Antony  
Claps on his sea-wing, and, like a doting  
mallard,  
Leaving the fight in height, flies after her :  
I never saw an action of such shame ;  
Experience, man-hood, honour, ne'er before  
Did violate so itself.”

The essential theme of the tragedy cannot be explained in the conventional terms of Antony's moral degradation and the 'fall of princes'. As a



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matter of ultimate values the 'noble ruin' is seen and felt to be nobler than 'high-battled Caesar', his 'emptiness' has a rarity unknown to 'full Caesar'. The real content of the time-honoured ideals of love, loyalty, duty, courage, dignity, magnanimity is revealed by means of situations and actions which are of doubtful morality on the conventional level. In fact the play is a continuous poetic process in which revelation of realities and revaluation of ideals develop together in a synchronous movement.

Literature matters because in some sense it is a revelation of life. *Instruction* suggests a cocksureness, a downright authoritarian laying down of the law, a dogmatic narrowness and driving at practice which are alien to the spirit of literature. It is tentative and exploratory; while realising some of the possibilities of human life it keeps an open mind regarding other possibilities—might-have-beens; it is an adventurous 'escape into life'. It undoubtedly teaches us many things about life and about ourselves, but usually it is not motivated by a desire to impart instruction. It is instructive because it is the lovingly perfected creation of men who want to express through it their own absorbing interest in life, their pungent but contemplative response to life.

## CHAPTER XV

### SELF-EXPRESSION

The emphasis on individuality in the post-Renaissance European culture inevitably transformed the current conceptions of literature and gave birth to the new doctrines of literary romanticism. While the traditional idea of literature assumed the impersonality of the writer and expected him to embody the heritage of social wisdom in the traditionally approved forms of poetry, the new revolutionary idea insisted upon the liberty of the writer to express his personality and his private view of the universe by means of experimental technique and original creation. The function of literature was conceived to be the self-expression of the writer—Montaigne's 'It's myself I portray'.

Of course this new formulation of the function of literature registers a change in the angle of approach. Delight and instruction as functions of literature primarily derive from the idea of literature as a social activity and a social tradition. The writer is a craftsman who does some traditionally approved types of jobs for the community; he is orientated towards the reading public or the audience, he gets his cue and takes his sanction from them. In such a context it will not occur to him to regard literature as a private apartment in which he can stretch and comfort himself as he pleases and indulge his pri-

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vate libido and personal idiosyncracies—and, in short, stew in his own juice. He will consider himself to be a worshipper in a public place of worship, using the recognised forms of devotion to express a perfectly genuine sentiment which is at once personal and social. He will be aware of living in the public eye, observed of all observers, using norms of judgment and forms of expression which have grown out of the common life and express the spirit of the people.

The flawing of this perfect understanding between writer and reader, the blunting of this sense of community and consciousness of common standards throws the writer on his own resources and reduces literature to a form of private self-indulgence :—

“Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold,  
Mere anarchy’s let loose upon the earth.”

A situation of this kind is favourable to the Romantic conception of the function of literature. The reader and the public cease to count : it is the writer’s point of view that directs our approach to literature. To the writer in the new situation literature is primarily a medium for complete self-expression, a stage on which he can without repression enact the drama of his life. He is not aware of a social vocation or a social purpose. He is writing unto himself and literature is only a projection of his personality—his ‘well-built nest’.

To the writer in the act of composition the creative activity of literature is undoubtedly an exercise of the organs of consciousness, a stretching out of his intellectual hands and feet. He is at once finding out what he can make of it all and trying to get it right by means of a feeling-toned use of language. He is mastering experience and mastering the

medium of language by imposing on either a personal pattern. Even when he is utilising a traditional *weltanschauung* and an inherited poetic diction he is in a thousand subtle ways adapting and shaping them to an intimately personal vision and idiom. He is finding himself by apparently losing himself in them, adding a personal flavour even to a traditional blend, as Crashaw in his *Nativity Hymn* :

" Winter chid aloud ; and sent

The angry North to wage his wars.

The North forgot his fierce Intent ;

And left perfumes instead of scars.

By those sweet eyes' persuasive powers

Where he meant frost, he scatter'd flowers."

His writings are definitely pieces of him, expressions of his personality. They are indeed 'the life-blood of a precious soul, embalmed and treasured up to a life beyond life'. When Newman in a classical passage expounded the nature of literature he had in mind this personal aspect of writing : " Literature is the personal use or exercise of language. The throng and succession of ideas, thoughts, feelings, imaginations, speculations, which pass within him, the abstractions, the juxtapositions, the comparisons, the discriminations, the conceptions which are so original in him, his views of external things, his judgments upon life, manners, and history ... the very pulsation and throbbing of his intellect does he image forth ... in a corresponding language, which is as multiform as this inward mental action itself, and analogous to it, the faithful expression of his intense personality, attending on his inward world of thought as its very shadow ... His thought and feeling are personal, and so his language is personal ".

Croce's *expressionism* is only an 'emotional systematisation' of the truth that the writing reflects the personality of the writer. It will be remembered that Croce regards all art as the full, free, unexpurgated expression of the impressions in the artist's mind. "So long as ugliness and turpitude exist in nature and impose themselves on the artist, it is not possible to prevent the expression of these things also." In fact the only excellence which can be legitimately demanded from a work of art is the completeness with which it expresses the personality of the artist : its social and moral consequences are entirely irrelevant to its artistic quality. The work of art need not give delight or instruction, it may not be either an imitation of life or a criticism of life, it need not be a thing of beauty or a joy for ever : so long as it has enabled the artist to achieve self-expression it is entitled to be regarded as a work of art.

Ignoring for the time being the factitious, casuistical nature of Croce's thought and taking the argument at its face value, we can accept the view that the genuine artist will strive to express himself, the shades and colours of his experience, by means of his work of art, that he will remain faithful to his intuition and will not falsify it in order to bask in social approval. But while this integrity will entitle his work to be taken seriously, it will not be the sole or even the main criterion of its value. The genuineness of the poem will undoubtedly depend upon its being the poet's genuine self-expression—either 'a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' or 'what oft was thought but ne'er so well express'd'; but the greatness, the value of the poem will depend upon the value of the self which is expressed, the

stature and quality of the personality which is the 'only begetter' of the poem. And it may be that the most impersonal poet has the most valuable personality to express in his poetry. The great poet is characterised not so much by the self-centred intensity of his private feelings and experiences as by his capacity to go out of his private self and sympathise with, imaginatively penetrate into the personalities and absorb the experiences of others. He is breaking down the narrow dykes of his individuality and pouring his stream into the ocean of humanity. He is learning to make the personal impersonal and the impersonal personal.

That is why Coleridge mentions, among the 'specific symptoms of poetic power' which he discerns in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* 'the choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself ... where the subject is taken immediately from the author's personal sensations and experiences, the excellence of a particular poem is but an equivocal mark, and often a fallacious pledge, of genuine poetic power.'

The poet who is preoccupied with himself unduly limits his range and repeats his effects ever less effectually. It is not merely that the most varied and colourful experience of an individual can only cover a small part of human possibilities : it is the paralysing incapacity of the self-centred man to look at things from the other man's point of view : कामी स्वतां पश्यति. This narcissism has proved fatal to the artistic quality of a good deal of romantic literature, as is evident from the work of Byron and Shelley.

It is by way of a counterblast to the subjective, personal theory of poetry popularised by the

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Romantics that T. S. Eliot put forward his 'impersonal theory of poetry' according to which "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." "The mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one not precisely in any valuation of 'personality', not being necessarily more interesting, or having 'more to say', but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations." Eliot uses the analogy of the catalyst—a filament of platinum which brings about a chemical combination but itself remains inert, neutral, and unchanged—to suggest the peculiar quality of a poetic mind: "The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material." A passage from Eliot's own poetry will show how completely a poet can transcend the limitations of a single—his own—personality and give a body and a voice to experiences which are not his own but which he has made his own:

"Here I am, an old man in a dry month,  
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.  
I was neither at the hot gates  
Nor fought in the warm rain  
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a  
cutlass,  
Bitten by flies, fought.  
My house is a decayed house,

And the jew squats on the window sill, the  
owner,  
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,  
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in  
London."

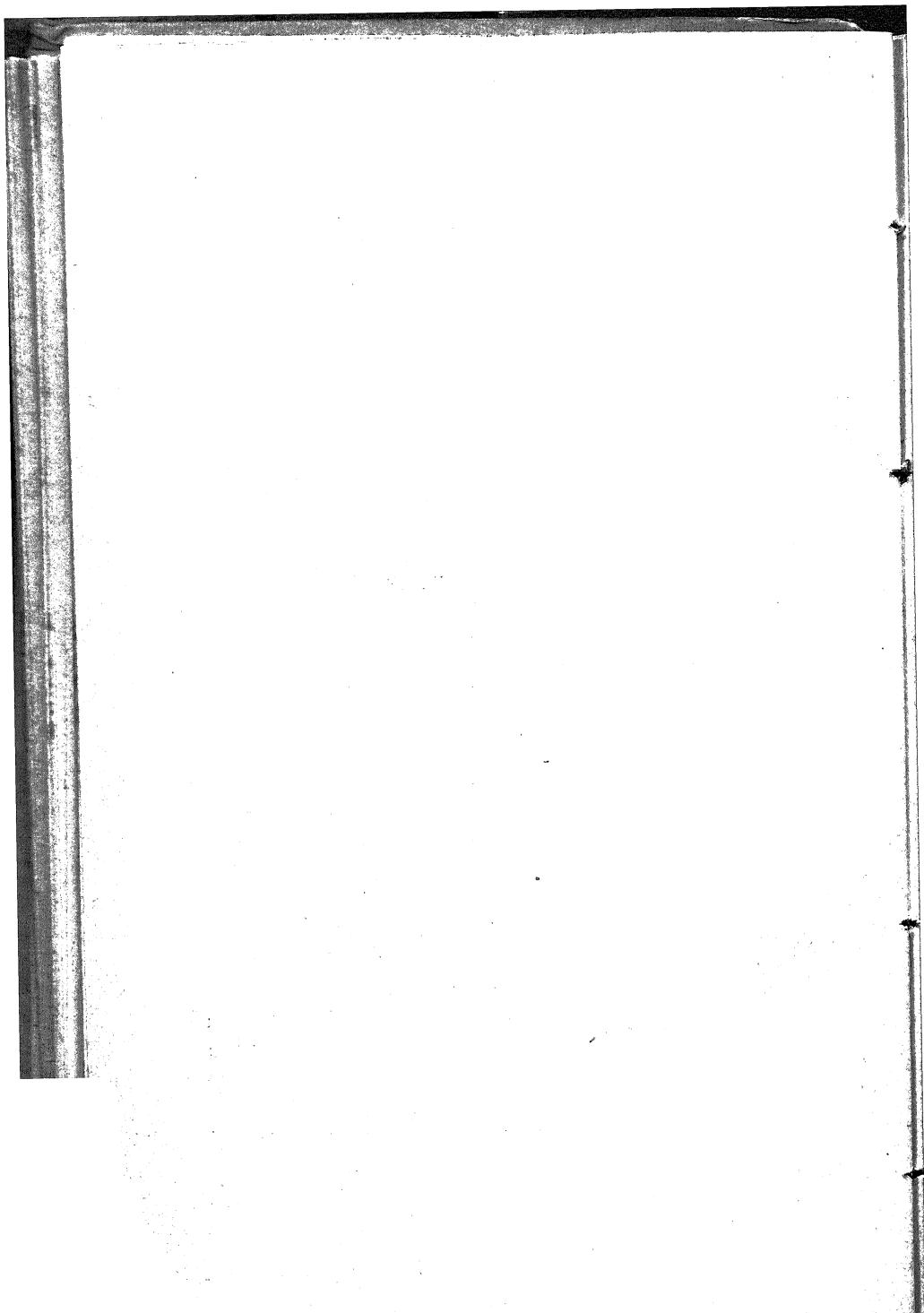
Here the images and the sentiments expressed have no biographical connection with the poet's own life : they are patterned into unity and charged with significance by his 'shaping spirit of imagination'. It is the free and unattached mind of the poet that has enabled him to make the impersonal personal, just as the same power enables Wordsworth to reverse the process and make the personal impersonal in a characteristic passage like the following :

"For I have learned

To look on Nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth ; but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity,  
Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power  
To chasten and subdue."

Ultimately, literature is worthwhile, not primarily because it reveals to us the moods and motions of a single personality, but because it enables us to 'see into the life of things'. While the poet will naturally be pre-occupied with the task of giving perfect expression to the 'vision within' and achieving complete 'self-expression' in that sense, the reader will not think it enough that the poem expresses the poet's personality ; he will sense the value of the poem by the value, the inclusiveness, the illuminating quality of the experience it sets going in his mind, the vision it enables him to see. Literature is not an appendix to autobiography, it is the very book of words set to 'the still, sad music of humanity.'





## CHAPTER XVI

### IMITATION

One of the earliest and most fully elaborated theories of the function of literature is the theory of *imitation* which, beginning with Plato's strictly literal interpretation, has assumed a number of different forms. Plato developing the philosophy of 'ideas' insisted that a genuine imitation can be achieved only on the basis of a knowledge of the 'forms' or 'ideas'. As for the actual poetry of the day, it was a mere phantasm, an 'imitation of an imitation', because the typical poet, claiming omniscience, was really an ignoramus. A real imitation will not be an illusion, it will be a creation; and the creative activity of poetry will co-operate with the creative activities of education, morals and politics to build up an ideal 'republic' which will be an imitation, an actual embodiment of the 'idea' of a republic. The thought implicit in Plato is made explicit by Aristotle when he says that the poet imitates what may happen, not, like the historian, what was happened. There are two elements in this idea of imitation. On the one hand there is the sorting out of the essentials and the unessentials, the probable and the possible, with the accompanying injunction to aim at the probable and avoid the merely possible; on the other hand there is the element of moral idealisation

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illustrated in the statement that the tragic poet in his imitation shows men to be better than they are.

Imitation as Plato and Aristotle understood it is intimately connected with the two great problems of truth in poetry and morality in poetry. Both are eager to claim that poetry in its ideal form aims at truth as well as at morality : literature is at once a form of knowledge—'more philosophical than history'—and a kind of moral persuasion—'making men better in some respect.' In later, post-Renaissance thought 'imitation' tends to develop into a doctrine of 'realism'. Shakespeare's well-known formulation of 'the purpose of playing' in *Hamlet*—"whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature ; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure"—takes for granted the moral discrimination between virtue and vice ; but the movement of its thought is towards a realistic, photographic presentation of life as it is, and away from an *imitation* of life as it may be or ought to be. In the Elizabethan-Jacobean period 'holding the mirror up to nature' is not yet associated with a morally neutral attitude ; but a little later, as in the Restoration Comedy of Manners, realism and amorality—if not immorality—are seen to have close affinities between them.

It is much later, after 18th century rationalism and late 18th century romanticism had formed and spent themselves, that imitation in the sense of photographic realism comes into its own in the art of Zola, Flaubert, Gissing and others. Literature was affected by the climate of opinion set by fact-finding science : scientific analogies and habits of thought

influenced artists and critics alike, as is clear from the scientific trends in the critical thought of Taine and Sainte-Beuve, and the scrupulous, painfully exact, documented realism of Zola and Gissing, of the 'naturalists'. In such a context, the aim of literature is taken to be a minute, photographically exact imitation of real life. And while in traditional art, both classical and romantic, attention is directed to the nobler aspects of human life and character, in the new scientific art attention is directed to the 'nasty, mean, brutish' aspects of life and character. Balzac's statement of his principles in his *Avant-Propos* may be taken as representing the naturalistic creed: "There is but one animal, ... (but) there exists, there will always exist, social species, as there are zoological species ... French society will be the historian, I shall need to be no more than the secretary." The scientific objectives of the naturalists are thus defined by Zola: "When it has been proved that the human body is a machine whose wheels can be manipulated at the will of the experimenter, we must pass onwards to the emotional and intellectual acts of man ... We have experimental chemistry and physics; we shall have experimental physiology; later still the experimental novel ... Since men of science, like Claude Bernard, now demonstrate that fixed laws govern the human body, we may announce without fear of deception the hour when the laws of thought and emotion will be formulated in their turn. A like determinism must regulate the stone on the highway and the mind of man." Finally, there is Flaubert's artistic ideal of the novel: "The author in his work ought to be like God in the universe, present everywhere but visible nowhere .... Art being a second nature the creator

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of this nature ought to act by analogous proceeding. I do not believe that the novelist should express his own opinions ... Has God ever expressed his opinions?"

Imitation as a literary ideal is valuable in so far as it inspires the artist to transcend the limitations of his private experience and personal idiosyncrasy and attempt to 'see life steadily and see it whole'. The artist, like the scientist, is undoubtedly moved by an insatiable curiosity about life, a desire to attain

"... that blessed mood

In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened",

to clear the blurred aspect of life caused by the 'film of familiarity and selfish solicitude' by focussing on life the lights of his 'intellectual being'. Before he can *imitate* life he must know it inside out, discriminate between the appearance and the reality, the form and the substance. Imitation need not, as Coleridge thought, be merely a matter of 'idle rivalry' if by imitation we understand the creation of what Flaubert called 'second nature'. This is the kind of imitation that enables Shakespeare to achieve in *Venus and Adonis* the excellence so discriminatingly pointed out by Coleridge: "You seem to be told nothing, but to see and hear everything. Hence it is that ... from the alienation and, if I may hazard such an expression, the utter *aloofness* of the poet's own feelings, from those of which he is at once the painter and the analyst; that though the very subject cannot but detract from the pleasure of a delicate mind, yet never was poem

less dangerous on a moral account." As the latter part of the above remark implies, such an imitation is valuable in and for itself, just because it strives to place before us the thing-in-itself, the something out there in the world which exists independently of us. Flaubert put it in his own inimitable way : "Not to intervene ! I think great art must be scientific and impersonal. You must by an effort of mind transport yourself into your characters, and not draw them into your orbit . . ." "If the reader does not draw from a book the morality which should be found there he is either an imbecile, or the book is false from the point of view of exactitude. For, from moment that a thing is true it is good. Obscene books are immoral only if they lack truth." This is the kind of imitation which characterises Tolstoy's *Anna Karanina*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Flaubert's *Madam Bovary*, an imitation in which the writer completely loses himself in the writing, in which 'Nature herself seems . . . to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power."

But of course, there are dangers and limitations in the doctrine of imitation which must be realised. In his efforts to achieve effects of uncompromising realism, to give 'une tranche de vie,' the imitative artist may dissolve his art into the mist and fog of the 'big blooming buzzing confusion' of actual life. He will be lost in the formless, dense, sprawling, blind facts of life : 'another sparrow came, and took away another grain of wheat', and so on *ad infinitum*. Naturalism can, like 'Nature's natural', empty the universe of all meaning. Imitation in art ought to be 'something intellectual', a constructive, illuminating activity, which seeks to give,

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not life but an idea of life. Imitation is worthwhile because it helps us out of the plight of Arjuna

“Distracted from distraction by distraction,  
Filled with fancies and empty of meaning,  
Tumid apathy with no concentration”—

because it tames and humanizes the formless monster of universal chaos and gives it a ‘fearful symmetry’.

In fact artistic imitation is a *human* product informed by a human purpose. It is life seen through a human medium and therefore patterned by human consciousness. Coleridge’s account of the ‘primary imagination’ is even more apposite to the ‘secondary imagination’:

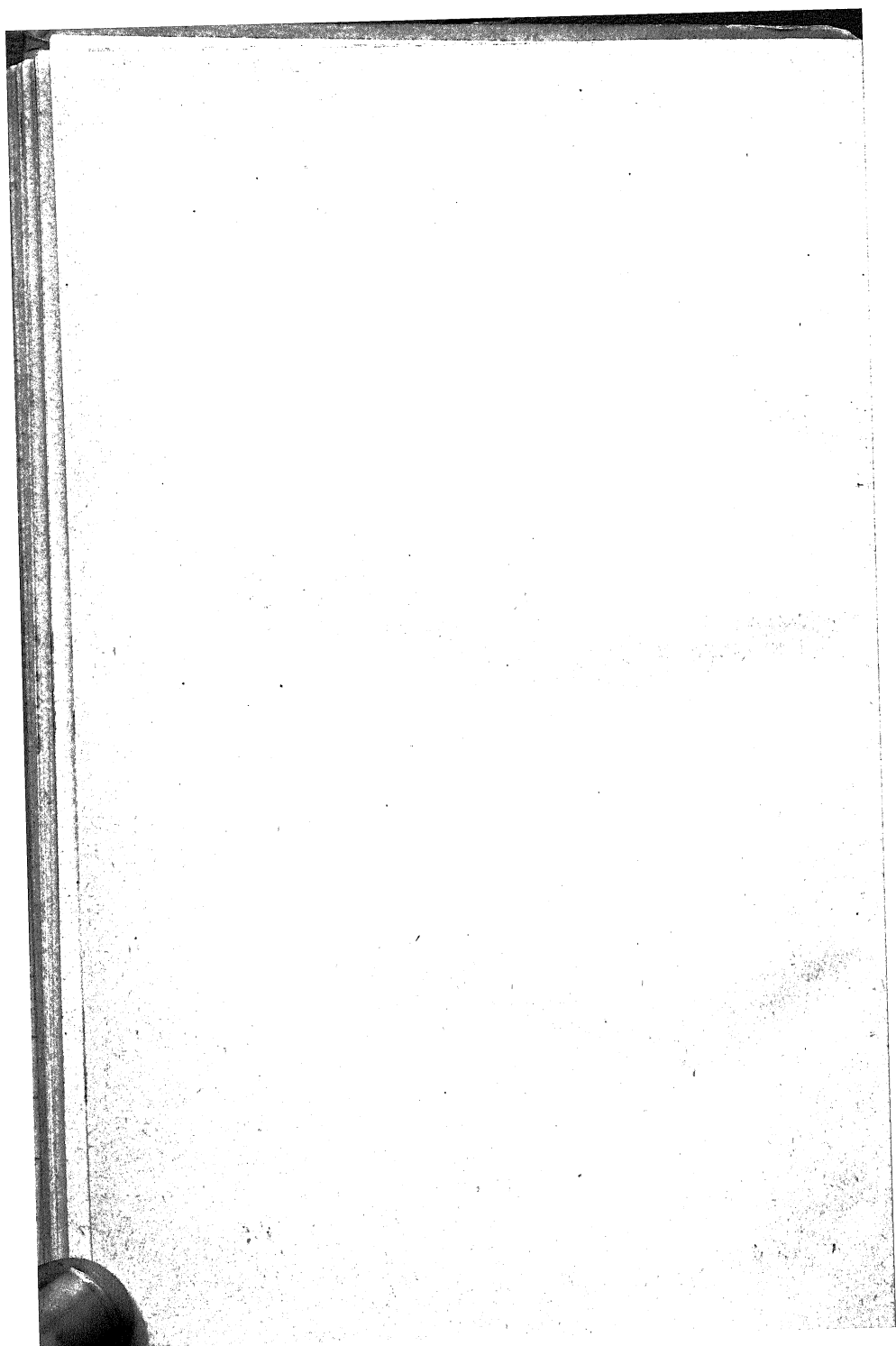
“O Lady! we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does nature live ...  
And would we ought behold of higher worth  
Than that inanimate cold world allowed  
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,  
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth  
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud  
Enveloping the Earth—.”

The imitation cannot avoid being an interpretation and valuation of life. “We make our own world; when we have made it away we can remake it approximately truer .... Man lives by imagination.” The work of art is an obvious instance of ‘making our own world’. Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* is not a copy of any one in the real world but a symbol of Flaubert’s own conception of the futility, the ennui, the spiritual anaemia of bourgeois civilization. Although he wants art to be impersonal and scientific and denies to the artist the right to express his opinions on the people in the novel or to manifest his own feelings, he in fact succeeds supremely well in evoking in the mind of the reader a definite attitude

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towards bourgeois civilization, a critical, disapproving attitude which the whole drift of the novel unmistakably shows to be his own: "In town, amid the noise of the streets, the hum of the theatres, and the splendours of the ball-room, they led existences in which the heart dilates, the senses expand. But she, her life was chill as an attic with a northern sky-light, and *ennui*, the light spider, spun its webs in the shadow in every corner of her heart ... nothing was worth the trouble of the search for it; everything lied. Every smile concealed a yawn of ennui, every joy a curse, every pleasure its mortification, and the best kisses left on the lips only an unrealisable longing for a pleasure more intense." The most objective, impersonal, without-comment imitation—if it is really an artistic imitation—turns to be 'life seen through a temperament', coloured and controlled by the mind of the imitator: 'the psyche envelops the thing perceived with categories which it has developed out of itself.'





## CHAPTER XVII

### CRITICISM OF LIFE

One of the latest formulations of the function of literature is the view that literature is a *criticism of life*. Appropriately enough, the phrase was coined in an age when critical self-consciousness of literature had become an established habit of mind with men of letters. Matthew Arnold, the maker of that phrase, was a poet-critic who believed in the value of literary criticism both to the artist and to the reader. He had an exalted notion of the function of criticism and naturally he was the first to realise vividly the critical function of literature, as he was undoubtedly the first to insist upon the creative function of criticism. Of course, by *criticism* he understood intellectual discrimination in general rather than literary criticism in particular—the consideration of ultimate values rather than of technical mastery. Criticism as he defined it was “A disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas” . . . . “in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power.”

His idea of the function of literature is a natural development of his conviction of the importance in the modern world of this ‘disinterested endeavour’ to know. Thus, in the early essay on ‘The function

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of criticism at the present time' he says : "...every one can see that a poet...ought to know life and the world before dealing with them in poetry ; and life and the world being in modern times very complex things, the creation of a modern poet, to be worth much, implies a great critical effort behind it ; else it must be a poor, barren, and short-lived affair." The 'great critical effort' which must precede the creation of the poet is the intellectual effort to master the baffling complexity of modern life, to disentangle the skein of its cross-purposes and discriminate between the good and the evil. When the poet could rely upon a traditional scale of values and a well-established philosophy of life, there was little occasion for such an antecedent critical effort by him : he could devote himself to his proper task of finding 'apt, significant and sounding words' for an experience and an evaluation of life which he had imbibed from the community. With the breakdown of the syntheses and the rejection of the old valuations, the poet has inevitably to be far more consciously critical in his dealings with life :

"The holy centaurs of the hill are vanished ;  
I have nothing but the embittered sun ;  
Banished heroic mother moon and vanished,  
And now that I have come to fifty years  
I must endure the timid sun."

It is in the context of this situation that, in the later essay on 'The study of poetry,' Arnold proceeds to suggest that we 'turn to poetry to interpret life for us' and defines its function as 'a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty.' While the 'consolation and the stay' which the poet can give to the reader will 'be of power in proportion

to the power of the criticism of life', this latter is conditioned by the laws of poetry. Poetry must be effective as poetry before it can be valuable as a 'criticism of life': it must be poetry by nature before it can perform its function as a criticism of life.

That literature is not a matter of blowing iridescent bubbles of artistic design, that it is not merely verbal filigree work, that its significance depends upon the seriousness with which it deals with some aspects of life, that in some sense it seeks to interpret life—this is the general impression which is sought to be conveyed by the phrase, 'criticism of life.' It claims for literature an essentially intellectual function and assimilates it to the other activities by which man tries to unravel the mystery of life. Though a great poet-critic of to-day, Mr. T. S. Eliot, roundly disapproves of the expression—"It will not do... to call it (poetry) a 'criticism of life,' than which no phrase can sound more frigid to any one who has felt the full surprise and elevation of a new experience of poetry"—it may be contended that the phrase aptly describes the significance of many great passages of poetry, including such a one of Mr. Eliot's as the following:

"You are not here to verify,

Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity

Or carry report. You are here to kneel

Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is  
more

Than an order of words, the conscious occupation  
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice  
praying.

And what the dead had no speech for, when  
living,



They can tell you, being dead : the communication

Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living."

If criticism is taken in its proper sense of a trained and developed habit of discrimination, a responsible weighing of all the factors involved in order to attain a balanced and final evaluation, there need be no frigidity about Arnold's phrase, which only describes a keen, sensitive, tense intellectual activity. Dr. F. R. Leavis is in the right when he interprets Arnold's doctrine as a reaction against the facile lubricity of 'Art for Art's sake.' As he puts it: "The seriousness with which he conceived the function and the importance he ascribed to poetry are more legitimately expressed in the phrase ... 'criticism of life.' ... Arnold's phrase is sufficiently explained—and, I think, vindicated—as expressing an intention directly counter to the tendency that finds its consummation in 'Art for Art's sake.' Aestheticism was not a sudden development : the nature of the trend from Keats through Tennyson and Dante Gabriel Rossetti was, even in Arnold's mid-career, not unapparent to the critic who passed the judgment on the great Romantics. The insistence that poetry must be judged as 'criticism of life' is the same critic's reaction to the later Romantic tradition ; it put the stress where it seemed to him that it most needed to be put."

The pattern of words on the page matters because it is an attempt to draw out the pattern of tangled experience. The poem or the novel is not life but what the poet makes of life, his *idea* of life. It may look like a 'slice of life,' it may be a 'symbol,' it may

be a 'true allegory of the state of one's own mind in a representative history,' it may be an 'expression of impressions,' it may be a 'tale which holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner,' it may 'submit the shows of things to the desires of the mind'; but it will always be sharpening and refining our sense of what is worthwhile in experience, it will always engage us on the problem of the values of life: in fact, it will never cease to be a 'criticism of life.' It is this preoccupation of literature with the meaning of life which the traditional critics seek to express by demanding loftiness of substance from great poetry. What they mean is that the poet should not be bemused by the magic and music of words, that he should not desert his intellectual function and go off into a gush of emotionality:—

"We are the music-makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams,  
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,  
And sitting by desolate streams;  
World-losers and world forsakers,  
On whom the pale moon gleams."



If literature has a responsible function in the modern world, a function unrelated to the huge commercial successes of the thrillers and the best-sellers, it can only be considered in the terms of a critical concern for human values. Literature seeks on the one hand to preserve the integrity of the specifically *human* experience and human consciousness against the fissiparous pressure of the aggressive specialisms—that is why it is the chief of the *humanities*—and on the other hand to deepen the experience and inform the consciousness by all that the specialisms have to offer in the way of the enrichment of human value.

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It is in fact the most valuable as it should be the most vital element in the tradition of human culture which is the tradition of man's efforts down the centuries to harmonize and harness to his own purposes the various currents of life branching out into science and art, philosophy and religion, business and morality, war and peace, work and play : his unending struggle, not merely for survival or power, but for the attainment of an ideal of *humanity*. And the more various and conflicting the currents the greater is the need for the kind of critical placing and adjustment of experience and values which is the main function of literature. In the modern world literature will increasingly be a 'criticism of life,' making us more keenly aware of the nature and meaning of life :

"For most of us, there is only the unattended  
Moment, the moment in and out of time,  
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,  
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning  
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply  
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music  
While the music lasts. These are only hints and  
guesses,  
Hints followed by guesses ; and the rest  
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and  
action."

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